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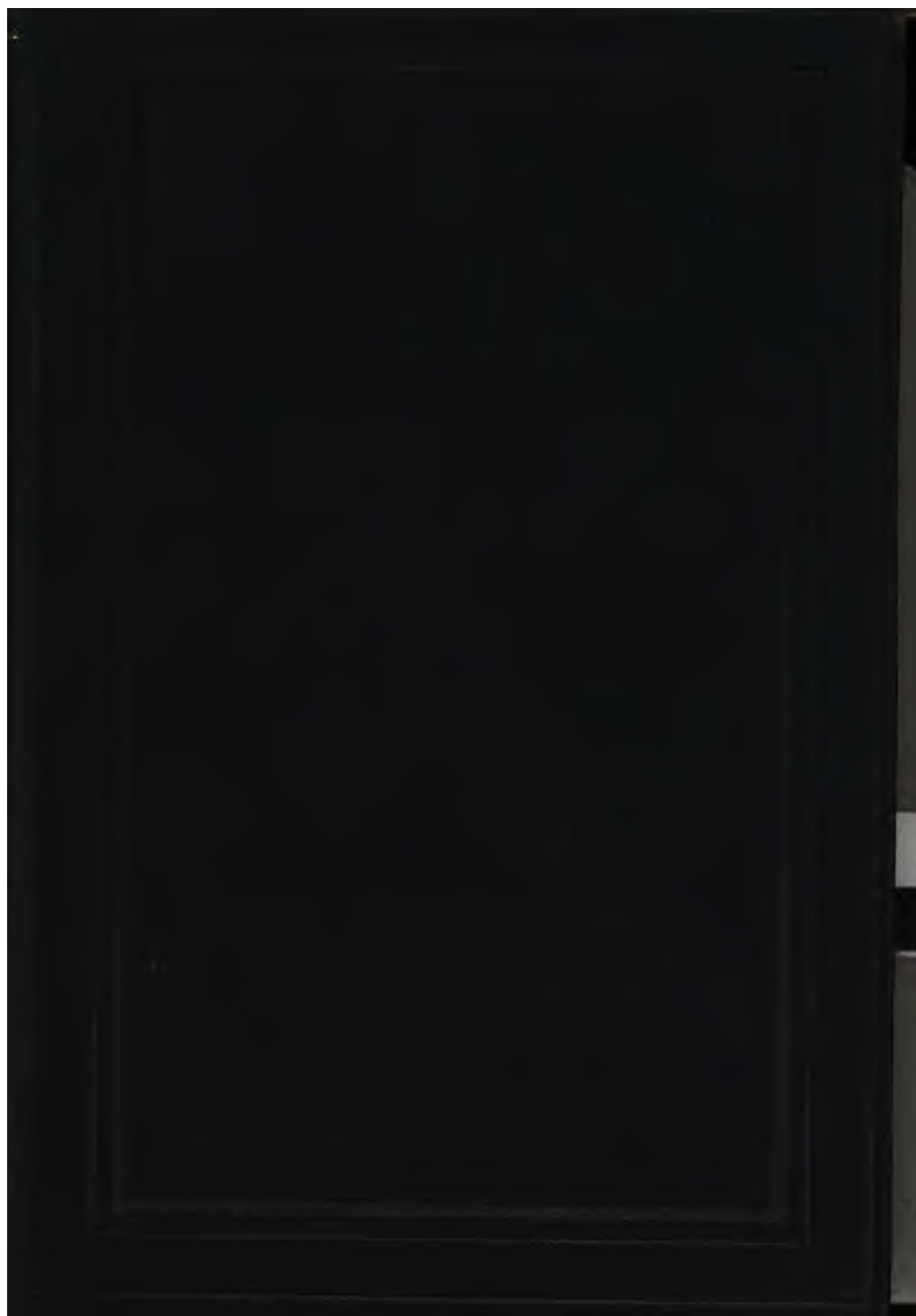
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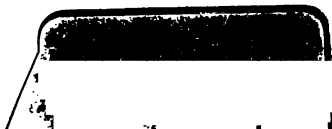
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NOTICE.

Just Published, in 2 vols. 8vo. price 30s.

ITALY REVISITED.

By A. GALLENGA,

AUTHOR OF

'ITALY IN 1848,' 'ITALY, PAST AND PRESENT,'

'THE INVASION OF DENMARK,'

&c. &c.

THE TIMES, Nov. 11, 1875.—“Mr. Gallenga's new volumes on Italy will be welcome to those who care for an unprejudiced account of the prospects and present condition of the country. He has written repeatedly on the subject before, but it is a changed world in the Peninsula since he published his ‘Italy in 1848.’ What used to be scouted as the dreams of enthusiasts have been more than realized, and the forebodings of statesmen who were at once sanguine and foresighted have been falsified to their own astonishment, by the most unlooked-for results. Mr. Gallenga was an eye-witness of those events of 1848; subsequently he accompanied the allied armies of liberation in the short and sharp campaign that was decided on the heights of Solferino. And now he relates his impressions on revisiting his native country, when she has been left for some years to herself, after being absolutely relieved of foreign occupation.....In noticing Mr. Gallenga's most interesting volumes, we have been obliged to confine ourselves chiefly to topics of grave national importance, and we wish we could also have done justice to his impressions of the Italy he revisited as seen in its lighter and social aspects. We can only say we believe the chapters we have neglected will prove the most attractive to the many English who are familiar with the country he describes so well, and we recommend the people who think of wintering there to get the book and read it for themselves.”

SCOTSMAN, Nov. 11, 1875.—“People who take up Mr. Gallenga's ‘Italy Revisited’ under the impression that it is only a record of Italian travel, will find themselves disappointed—pleasantly so, if they have, as they ought to have, any feeling of interest in that marvellous land, and in

the nation which during the last twenty years has come into existence there. Mr. Gallenga's work is, in fact, a sketch of the present condition of Italy—political, social, and economical. He is excellently well fitted for the task he has undertaken. No Englishman could hope to have such an insight into the Italian character, such an appreciation of the progress that is being made in the work of regeneration going on in Italy, and of the obstacles which stand in the way of that work ; such a thorough comprehension of the great problem that Italian statesmen have to solve, as one who, himself an Italian, and a keen politician, has had his views widened and matured by long residence in other countries. Though Mr. Gallenga is an ardent patriot, and though his sympathies are evidently with the movement which has brought into being a United Italy, there is nothing illiberal about his opinions—no attempt to hide the faults of his own party or exaggerate those of his opponents.....It would be easy to multiply instructive extracts from this book, but persons who desire to obtain a truthful conception of the present condition and future prospects of Italy, cannot do better than read it for themselves. A more truly informatory and valuable work on the subjects with which it deals has not been published for a long time."

OBSERVER, Nov. 7, 1875.—" *Facile princeps* in the ranks of those who have laboured, through the influential channel of journalism, to arouse the sympathies of the world for the kingdom of Italy, and to enable it to judge of Italy's condition and Italy's prospects, has been, and still is, Mr. Gallenga, the author of the two substantial volumes which he calls by the name to be found at the head of this notice. It would be wonderful if any one could pretend to be his rival, seeing that he combines with the advantages of Italian birth, training, residence, and long experience, a complete mastery of the English tongue, an intimate familiarity with English interests and ways of thought, and, be it added, almost a something more than English hard-headedness and practical common sense.....What gives it its chief value is the fact that a highly intelligent Italian, who had known Italy in its evil days, when foreign soldiers and native priests between them outraged and demoralised its people, gives in his pages the unvarnished impression made upon his mind on revisiting it in the heyday of its successful assertion of unity and independence."

London :

SAMUEL TINSLEY, PUBLISHER,

10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.

IN SPITE OF FORTUNE.

A Novel.

BY
MAURICE GAY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I



London:
SAMUEL TINSLEY,
10 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.
1876.

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251. d. 205.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. AT THE CLUB	I
II. LADY BEATRICE	17
III. DISCONTENTED	34
IV. RENEWING OLD ACQUAINTANCE	51
V. AN UNWELCOME SUITOR	64
VI. CYRIL MEREDITH'S RELATIVE	72
VII. A SACRED TRUST	90
VIII. A CHANCE MEETING	105
IX. MABEL'S SECRET	115
X. CHEVERTON HALL	124
XI. MET AGAIN	130
XII. THE MISTRESS OF CHEVERTON	138
XIII. BONDAGE	153
XIV. AMONG THE RUINS	165
XV. MARKHAM'S HISTORY	184
XVI. RIVALRY	196
XVII. PERCY CARRICK	207

CHAP.	PAGE
XVIII. A GOOD UNDERSTANDING	218
XIX. A PHILOSOPHER	230
XX. A CONSULTATION	241
XXI. THE RIVALS	254
XXII. WOED AND WON	261

IN SPITE OF FORTUNE.

CHAPTER I

AT THE CLUB.

It was the height of the London season—the season when the West End presents an ever-moving panorama, when the shops, brave and attractive with novelties in apparel, the countless equipages drawn by horses, the price of any one of which is more than a poor man's income, their elegantly-attired occupants, are signs of the wealth that is possessed and spent in this great, overgrown city.

At a window of one of the most central clubs stood three gentlemen, two of whom were young men, the third, a man advanced

in years: they were Lord Warton, Mr. Morris, and Mr. Harwood. The three friends talked for some time on the topics of the day, and then separated to read the papers. While they are thus engaged, there will be an opportunity of making them known to the reader.

Mr. Morris was the eldest son of a country gentleman of a good but not very ancient family. Though not rich, and with nothing remarkable to boast of in the way of birth, Charlie Morris, as he was familiarly called, was one of the best known, and most popular men in London society. At Harrow, he had been what Harrovians emphatically term a "swell"—for the benefit of those not acquainted with the strict meaning of those classic words by which public school-boys express their sentiments, it may be mentioned that a "swell" signifies a boy who is great at cricket, racquets, and all athletic games. To his proficiency in these manly arts, and also to his good looks and genial manners, Charlie Morris owed the

proud position to which the respect and admiration of his fellows exalted him. His popularity, the foundation of which had been laid at school, accompanied him into the army and society. A boy, who is popular with his class-mates, is almost sure to retain his popularity when he grows to manhood ; for a genial temperament and agreeable manners secure the friendship of all classes and ages.

Lord Warton was a man of a totally different stamp from that of Morris. While the warmest friends of the ex-guardsman could scarcely deny that he was a drone in the hive of fashion, all the world gave Warton credit for being one of the most industrious of bees. He had sat in parliament for some years, in which he had gradually acquired the reputation of a " rising " man, a man who would ultimately find his proper place among the leaders of his party. He was no orator : his style indeed, was pompous and turgid ; but his ideas were generally sound, although he

conveyed them in an awkward dress. Altogether, Lord Warton was a fair specimen of the highly-educated, intellectual English nobleman, who finds in politics his legitimate sphere of action.

Mr. Harwood, the third member of the party, was an elderly man ; and enjoyed amongst his friends the reputation of an "oddity" who possessed the tongue of a cynic and the heart of a philanthropist. He performed many kind actions, but he rarely said a kind thing. Some persons ascribed his peculiarities to affectation : others, more charitable, to the loss of a wife to whom he had been devotedly attached. But in spite of his eccentricities, he was popular with young and old, most of his friends being of opinion that his satire was, as a rule, very harmless. This afternoon, he seemed to be in one of his most cynical moods ; his comments upon the various items of news he perused were frequent, and invariably sarcastic. Now, it was the decision of a judge that provoked his ire ;

now the verdict of a jury ; now the speech of a member.

“ These breach of promise cases are becoming a national scandal !” he exclaimed angrily. “ A designing woman lays a trap for a foolish man, who, in time, repents his folly. She arraigns him before twelve fellow-creatures with as little brains as himself, who mulct the dupe to reward the schemer. It all comes of that boasted institution, trial by jury. Bah ! trial by fools and blockheads.”

“ Experience must be paid for,” answers Lord Warton in that clear, cold voice, which is suggestive of the speaker’s having no two opinions upon the subject that he is discussing. “ A man who enters upon matrimony without due deliberation is a fool for whom I have no sympathy. I wish juries would give heavier damages in these cases ; it might serve as a wholesome deterrent to succeeding generations of idiots.”

Mr. Harwood does not pursue the argu-

ment, but in a few moments he offers an opportunity for a fresh one.

"What egregious asses your party are making of themselves, Warton! They came into office with a majority that could have worked anything, and yet after two sessions their achievements are *nil*."

"My dear Harwood, what party could hope to secure your approbation?" replies his lordship with a faint smile, indicative of contempt for his friend's criticism. "You spoke in very nearly the same terms of the opposition when they were in power."

"I know I did," says the irritable Harwood; "and I was glad on the whole to see them turned out, because I thought that the new set would take warning by their fate, and commence some wholesome legislation. But I see I was in error. There is no real difference between them when they are in office. They play the same game, talk much and do little."

Warton was about to enter on a defence of his party, into which he would probably

have thrown as much enthusiasm as he was capable of, when he was interrupted in his purpose by the entrance of a young man whose appearance appeared to create surprise among the group by the window, for they all turned eagerly to him with a simultaneous cry of "Elmore!"

The new-comer was tall and tolerably good-looking, with merry blue eyes that seemed to promise their owner to be a jovial fellow.

"Where have I come from? I anticipate the question," he said; as he shook hands rapidly all round. "I have arrived direct from Paris, but to tell you every place that I have visited since I left England two years ago, would be to anticipate a book of travels that I intend to publish. Satisfy my curiosity first. Remember, I have been an exile. Who is the latest literary lion?"

"A young man named Cyril Meredith," answered Morris, "who has written a poem that has thrilled all the romantic young ladies, and provoked a hundred and

fifty imitations. He is very handsome too: so you may judge that he is in great request."

"Good, you've answered my first question succinctly. Who is he?"

"Nobody knows. His origin is enshrouded in a delightful mystery. He was brought up by an old aunt who lives in Kent, but the aunt bars the way to more extended information. He's not related to any of the Merediths that one knows. In a word, he has no ancestors."

"Genius very seldom has," interposed Harwood. "Genius becomes the ancestor to other people, to a posterity that has no other recommendation."

"Bravo, Harwood!" cried Geoffrey Elmore. "You're quite right. Genius can afford to do without a grandfather. But I fancy I've met this Cyril Meredith. I became sworn friends for a week with a man of that name in Paris, when I first left England. He was a likely sort of fellow to turn into a poet; he used to look at

life in an excessively philosophical spirit. There cannot possibly be two Cyril Meredith's who are poetical and philosophical?

"Peculiar coincidence if there were."

"I will renew the acquaintance now that he has become famous," said Elmore, laughing. "If you're not celebrated yourself, you can't do better than secure the friendship of those who are."

"Why, Geoffrey, you have positively returned with some worldly wisdom about you!" exclaimed Mr. Harwood, with his cynical smile. "I remember when you went away, you were singularly innocent and credulous."

"Two years of travel sharpens your wits wonderfully. I don't think you will have to complain of me now, Mr. Harwood. But I have not finished half my questions yet. I want to know who carries the golden apple? Morris, you are a connoisseur in female beauty, tell me all about her."

"Lady Beatrice Neville is her name, and

she defies description. How can I make you understand the soul which speaks in her clear, hazel eye, the fascination of the smile that comes from her perfect lips, the natural and charming gestures which make her as graceful as she is beautiful."

"Bravo, Morris, I declare you have developed into a poet."

"You flatter me. I have coquetted with the Muses, though not to a very great extent," he replied with a modest smile.

"But let me proceed. You may be sure that beauty so unparalleled has received abundant homage. The name of her admirers is legion. But the fair Beatrice will have none of them. She prefers to remain in 'maiden meditation, fancy free.' So there is a chance for you, Elmore."

"Yes, I'm a very eligible match. If I had as many thousands a year as I have hundreds, there might be a chance of being refused with the rest of her admirers, but under the present circumstances Lord Ravensworth would expire with astonish-

ment at my audacity in aspiring to his daughter's hand."

"She's evidently very difficult to please," said Morris. "She's rather literary in her tastes, I believe; a good bit of the blue stocking about her, in fact. But she's immensely popular: even Harwood praises her."

"I always praise everything and everybody who deserve praise," answered Mr. Harwood, gruffly. "Beatrice Neville is a sensible, clever, good-hearted girl, and any man who is fortunate enough to win her, will secure a treasure."

"I don't think she's so popular with her own sex; but then, what good-looking woman ever is?" said Morris. "Her great friend at present is Edith Barrington. They are inseparables."

A slight flush passed over Geoffrey Elmore's sunburnt features at the mention of that name. "Edith Barrington," he repeated. "You mean the daughter of the late Sir Alfred Barrington?"

"The same," replied Morris. "Her mother is a lady who tries very hard to look ten years younger than she is, and is sentimental and poetical in her conversation: always quoting from Shakespeare and Pope."

"Her ideas are manufactured from the minds of others," interposed Harwood.

"Edith Barrington is a very old friend of mine," said Elmore. Her father had an estate for several years that joined my father's: he subsequently sold it. Edith and I were playmates, and childish lovers. She must be a woman now: she was only sixteen when I left England, and then I had not seen her for more than a year."

"She is excessively pretty, I can tell you," said Morris. "Of course she is not to be compared to Lady Beatrice, any more than a violet is to be compared to a rose: but she's pretty enough to fall in love with. So take care, Elmore, or the childish affection may ripen into something more serious. Something that time will not cure so easily."

At this juncture Lord Warton put down his newspaper, and left the room.

"Warton is going to the House, I suppose," remarked Morris. "He is a most industrious legislator. I think he has set his heart upon being in the Cabinet, one of these days. It is reported that Lady Beatrice numbers him among her numerous admirers. But it is difficult to tell. He is very proud, you know, and takes care not to let his devotion be too palpable. I believe he would die with shame if he thought his friends knew that he had been refused."

"How does the lady bear herself towards him?"

"Oh, much the same as she does towards the rest—as far as outsiders can judge. She treats them all with a friendly courtesy that means nothing. But, of course, it would be a good match, looked at from a worldly point of view. Warton will be a man of great influence some day, not very distant from the present; and when his father dies, he will be immensely rich."

"Is Lady Beatrice a romantic-minded young lady?"

"She has got that character with those who know her best," replied Morris.

"I should scarcely think then that War-ton is the man she would prefer. There is nothing romantic about *him*."

"No, he's like an iceberg. He couldn't feel enthusiastic about anything, that fellow. He's a mathematical machine; he does everything by rule; is never surprised, never disconcerted. One of those model men that I detest."

"Well, I must see Lady Beatrice, and no doubt I shall secure a more favourable reception if I am introduced through Edith Barrington. A proper introduction is half the battle."

"Ravensworth gives a grand garden party next week," said Morris. "I have no doubt your old friend will get you a card if you wish for one. Everybody of note will be there, including Mr. Meredith; so you can admire Lady Beatrice, and re-

new your acquaintance with him at the same time."

The two friends talked for some time longer, and then separated — Geoffrey walking back to his chambers. As he turned from the steps of the club, a carriage drove rapidly past him ; but not too rapidly for him to recognize the occupants ; they were Lady Barrington and her daughter. Edith was considerably altered from the last time he had seen her, but the alteration had been for the better. Edith Barrington was prettier than he had pictured her to be, he confessed to himself as he went along.

He sat for a long time in his chambers, musing over the past ; it is almost needless to say that Edith was the subject of his reverie. That chance meeting had kindled the boyish love which had been slumbering in his heart for the last three years. He rose presently, and going to a drawer took from it a packet of letters which he read over carefully. They were written to him

when she was a child, but he seemed to find great interest in these epistles in his present mood. And when he had read them through, he tied them up carefully and put them away in the drawer as a sacred treasure.

"She is the only woman I've thought about since I've been away," he said to himself; "and she's the first woman I meet when I return. Dear little Edith! Can fate have destined her for me? But what's the use? If she hasn't forgotten me by this, which is more than probable, she'd never marry a poor devil with fifteen hundred a year. And it isn't likely she would wait till I could earn more. I am afraid I must get over that foolish dream."

CHAPTER II.

LADY BEATRICE.

THE description of Lady Beatrice Neville which Morris had given to his friend was scarcely overcoloured. Beautiful as the most fastidious taste could desire ; a heiress, the descendant of one of the oldest families in England, she had much of which she might be reasonably proud. But, in spite of these worldly advantages, her character had remained unspoiled. There was a serene dignity about her whole bearing, and shallow persons sometimes mistook serenity for pride. She was one of those women who can control their emotion, and hide it successfully from stranger eyes, a

faculty which not unfrequently procures the possessor the reputation of a cold nature.

She was liked by those who knew her, for none who were intimate with her could long remain insensible to her warm heart and noble qualities ; and those who spoke highly of her were, as a rule, those whose praise was most worth having. But with the mob of general acquaintance, she was, perhaps, less popular than her social and personal advantages entitled her to be ; and here the reason was not far to seek. She had the greatest scorn for those petty arts, on the successful cultivation of which popularity greatly depends. Her nature was too sterling, her character too strongly developed, to allow her to be all things to all persons. She never temporized with her real opinions in order to gain a little temporary flattery. Amongst her own sex there were few with whom her friendship was of a strong or deep nature. In Edith Barrington, a comparatively recent acquaintance,

she found one who understood and sympathized with her more than most.

At first sight, there seemed very little in common between the two. Edith was light, vivacious, without pretensions to dignity of demeanour or mind; but she had many good qualities. She was generous, constant in her likings, true to her friends, and somewhat original in her way of looking at some of the social problems which her mother had presented to her for solution. She was not the least jealous of Beatrice's superior personal attractions. She seemed to consider her friend was on such a high pedestal that jealousy or rivalry was out of the question; an opinion which would, most certainly, not have been shared by Lady Barrington, who, amongst other weaknesses, numbered the maternal one of considering her daughter equal to any of her contemporaries.

Lady Beatrice was seated in her *boudoir* with Edith, a few days before Lord Ravensworth's garden party was to take place.

"How glad I shall be when the season is over!" exclaimed Beatrice, after a pause. "I feel like a bird let loose from his cage when I get back to those glorious Devonshire woods. What a capricious goddess Fashion is, shutting us up in this furnace of London when the country is at its best!"

"We must have a season, or we should never get married," replied Edith, with a merry laugh. "London is the great matrimonial market, to which every species of maid and bachelor is attracted."

"Do you think our admirers would not like us as well in the country?"

"No, certainly not," answered Edith. "It is not every one who has a soul for nature; but everybody finds time go agreeably in London. Besides, you forget that in the country there is more opportunity for both sides to criticize."

"Ah, I forgot that important point. Love should be blind, I know. It is a sad day when he recovers his sight."

"That is some of your friend Mr. Harwood's cynicism," cried Edith.

"Say what you please about Mr. Harwood ; he is one of the best-hearted men I know. You would not believe it, to hear him talk, I'll allow, but I have had too many proofs of it to doubt it."

"My dear Beatrice, I believe it also," replied Edith. "He talks cynically before an audience, but when you are alone with him he is natural and agreeable. But, touching on other matters, why are you not going to the Favershams' to-night ? Are you determined to reserve yourself for the grand fête on Tuesday ?"

"What a contemptible motive !" said Beatrice, smiling. "As if that would prevent me, if I fancied I should derive any pleasure from going to the Favershams'. But I know I should only get bored if I went."

"Why ?" exclaimed Edith, in surprise. "All the best people will be there."

"I know they will, and I've met them so

often that I want to have a little rest from them. I should like to meet some of the worst people, for a change."

"Well, I must own, variety is pleasant," said Edith, with a little sigh. "But, you see, we can't choose in this world. Besides, Lord Warton is to be there; and you like him surely, or, at least, you did, not very long ago."

"I did, but he is not a man who improves upon acquaintance. He is clever, I confess, but there is no brilliance, no sparkle about his cleverness. He is too cold."

"He is one of mamma's great favourites," said Edith; adding, "But then mamma likes any one who is rich. That is one of her little weaknesses."

"Lord Warton has no soul," continued Lady Beatrice with animation. "His mind is a digest of blue books and statistics. He is prosaic, painfully prosaic. A newspaper and a political article are his only literature. I believe his real opinion is,

that Shakespeare was a very inferior man to Addington."

"And yet he admires you. Of that there is no doubt."

"I am sorry for it. I cannot reciprocate the compliment," answered Beatrice, with an impatient movement. "I trust his admiration will never ripen into anything more serious. But of that there is scarcely any reasonable ground for apprehension. Such a nature as his is hostile to love."

There was a long pause after this, which Edith broke by saying :—

"You have heard me speak of Geoffrey Elmore?"

"Your old playmate and boy-lover?—yes, very often. Never mind the blushes, Edith, I will not take any notice of them. Proceed."

"Well, you know he has been abroad the last two years," said Edith, a little confused in her manner. "Of course I have never heard from him during that time ;

but yesterday he called upon us. Unfortunately mamma and I were out."

"Of course he called to see mamma?" interrupted Lady Beatrice, smiling.

"Of course he did," replied Edith, with affected demureness. "Well, this morning, I received a letter with the usual protestations of what pleasure he would derive from seeing me after so long an absence, and ending with a request that I would procure him a card for your party."

"In order to enjoy a comfortable *tête-à-tête* with you, while mamma is occupied elsewhere, I suppose?"

"Possibly," answered Edith; adding, "or perhaps his sole motive is curiosity to see the *belle* of the season. Of course he has heard of you."

"Pooh," said Beatrice, with a heightened colour; "I am not such an important person as you would make me out to be. I am only a unit in a very large world. I daresay he has not heard my name."

"My dear Beatrice, do not be absurd,"



replied Edith, authoritatively. "Of course he has heard all about you. Ours is a very small world. A *belle* and a heiress in addition—who would not hear of you?"

"I wish then I were celebrated for something else!" exclaimed Beatrice, with a sudden sharpness in her tone which surprised her friend.

"How ungracious!" cried Edith, after a slight pause; during which she had been trying to account for that abrupt exclamation. "Money and good looks! what more could a woman desire to make her happy? You should have my mother to read you a worldly homily on that subject."

"Lady Barrington could not by any possibility understand my case, dear;" replied Beatrice, with a slight impatience in her tone. "I daresay women ought to be contented with their circumscribed sphere, but unfortunately, I cannot bring myself to content. Why should not a woman make a name for herself as well as a man? We have as much brains, let the men say

what they please to the contrary. It is only a stupid prejudice that keeps us down."

"Poor Beatrice! what would you like to be?" laughed Edith. "Commanding an army of Amazons, or sitting in the cabinet as secretary of state, or presiding as judge over all the cases in which men beat their wives?"

"If you are only going to laugh at me, Edith, I am very sorry I was foolish enough to utter such a remark before you."

"Now do not be angry with your best friend, Beatrice," cried Edith in a pleading tone. "Only you know, it does sound so unworldly to hear a girl railing at fortune because it cast her lot in such pleasant places."

So harmony was restored between the two, and Lady Beatrice gave utterance to no more sentiments of the nature that had provoked her friend's remonstrance. Her most intimate friends were apt to con-

sider her a little odd in some respects ; some fancied she must have derived this oddity from her mother, a lady with next to nothing to boast of in the matter of birth, whom Lord Ravensworth had married when he was a comparatively poor man, with three lives between himself and an earl's coronet. Even her father, indulgent as he was towards his daughter's caprices, had answered her very gravely on a similar occasion.

“ My dear child, I am not a sordid man, and I do not respect money for itself,” he had said ; “ but I had some experience of limited means both before you were born and after, when you were too young to understand it ; and I can assure you that nothing is more injurious to a refined nature and mind than a state of semi-poverty. Be grateful, therefore, Beatrice, that the good gifts of the world have been showered upon you in profusion ; for there are millions who would be glad to change places with you.”

Beatrice had not ventured to refute this, but it may be questioned whether in her heart she fully believed in her father's regard for money and position.

The day of the garden-party arrived, and the splendid weather supplied the one element, the absence of which could alone have marred its success. Lord Ravensworth gave some of the pleasantest parties in London, for he never confined them exclusively to his own class. At his house you were sure to meet the most famous men of the day in every department; celebrated sculptors, noted painters, literary men whose names were household words. The present gathering was delightfully heterogeneous. The heir to a dukedom was standing amongst a group which comprised an author who had worked his way up from the sons of the soil: and a Countess was discoursing affably with the young lady artiste whose picture in the Exhibition of that season had created such a sensation. It is usual to rail against the exclusiveness of the British

aristocracy, but no society throws open its portals more readily to talent, nor is more successful in making the new-comer forget that he has not always been one of themselves.

Geoffrey Elmore was one of the first to arrive; and Edith, whom he sought immediately on his arrival, led him up to Lady Beatrice, who received him with the cordiality due to her friend's old playmate.

"Has Mr. Meredith arrived yet," asked Elmore presently. "For I am excessively anxious to see him?"

"Several persons have been asking the same question, and assigning for it the same reason," answered Lady Beatrice. "He has not come yet. I must let him know in what request he has been when he does arrive."

"Here he comes," cried Edith, who had been looking in a different direction.

Elmore's gaze followed her own, and he recognised in the figure advancing towards them his Paris friend. It used to be a

popular notion, and may linger even now in some minds, that poets are an ill-dressing, odd-looking race. If this be the case, Cyril Meredith was a striking exception to the rule : the uprightness of his tall, symmetrical figure suggested a military training rather than occupations of a sedentary nature. His face was handsome, the chief beauty of it consisting in the dark, brilliant hazel eyes, and the finely-chiselled mouth.

"There have been many awaiting your arrival with eagerness, Mr. Meredith," said Lady Beatrice, after he had bowed to the ladies. "One of the most anxious is this gentleman, who claims previous acquaintance."

"Don't you remember our meeting at Paris, and our visit to the Morgue together?" asked Elmore, smiling ; for he perceived from Meredith's blank look that the brief acquaintance had passed from his memory.

"Pardon me, I remember you perfectly now," answered Meredith, extending his

hand. "But you have grown a beard since those days."

"And my appearance is not sufficiently distinguished to make an indelible impression on one's memory, I suspect," laughed Elmore. "But I have to congratulate you on bringing to glorious fruit those poetical blossoms which I was keen enough to discover during our short friendship."

"Then let me assure you that I am more grateful to you for your early appreciation at a time when I thought myself to be the only prophet to my promise, than I am to those whose compliments are profuse after the event."

"That speech is scarcely fair to your friends, who had not the opportunity of knowing you so intimately as Mr. Elmore;" said Lady Beatrice, with a charming smile.

"I meant not to seem ungrateful," replied Meredith, "but you know we always have an affection for those who knew us in our obscure days; they seem the links that bind the old life to the new."

At this moment Lord Ravensworth came up to the group, accompanied by the Earl of Burnley, Lord Warton's father. Both these gentlemen were unmistakably of the old school, their somewhat elaborate politeness contrasting in a marked manner with the less conventional manners of the present day.

Lord Burnley looked at Meredith with a gaze that was a little too earnest for politeness, and almost immediately he seemed conscious of it, for he said in a somewhat apologetic tone—

"Pardon my seeming rudeness, Mr. Meredith, but you remind me so much of a very dear friend that I knew in my youth. May I ask you if you have any relatives in Sussex of the name of Graham?" He uttered the last word in a hesitating tone, as if he had invented the name in order to make some apology for his rudeness.

"None that I am aware of. In fact I believe I have no relatives living, or if I have, they are as good as dead to me for the knowledge of them I possess."

The old earl bowed courteously, and changed the subject, but ever and anon Meredith perceived him regarding him with that same earnest, half-puzzled gaze, as if he were trying to fix some likeness that escaped him.

CHAPTER III.

DISCONTENTED.

LORD WARTON came late to Twickenham ; he had no admiration for these general gatherings of society, in which the man who could talk chit-chat the most fluently shone to the greatest advantage. His own acquirements were of a very solid order, and he eschewed small talk as unbecoming in a man of intellect. He was a dry, hard man ; a man of facts and figures, with no wit himself, and very little appreciation of it in others ; more popular with middle-aged than with young ladies, who thought him dull, and whom, in revenge, he denounced as frivolous. The boy is father to the man :

at school he had the same reputation for solidity, unaccompanied by brilliancy ; a boy of whom his associates had said to each other—"a quiet, reserved fellow ; impossible to like him very much."

Even had he been conscious of his repellent manner, which he was not, it is to be doubted whether he would have tried to bring it more into harmony with popular notions of geniality. He was too absorbed in self-worship to admit a doubt of his perfections : the heir to the great and wealthy house of Burnley, he stood on a pinnacle, to which the opinion of humbler men could not reach. A strange contrast to his father, who had been most popular in his youth, and still retained a large share of popularity in his old age !

Lord Warton had made up his mind to marry, and to select a woman worthy of sharing the honours of the house of Burnley was not an easy task. At length, his choice had fallen on Lady Beatrice Neville : in her he considered that he had met with a

woman whose social advantages coincided with his own. Regarding her at first in a very practical light as a possible wife, he had soon come to regard her in a sentimental light as the only woman whom he would care to make his wife. In a word, Lord Warton was as much in love as could have been expected of a man of his frigid temperament.

He watched Beatrice's graceful figure flitting about the grounds with great satisfaction, thinking how soon her grace and beauty would shed a reflected lustre on himself as their possessor. He had not, as yet, ascertained her sentiments towards him, but the possibility of rejection had scarcely entered his thoughts. Where was it possible that she could secure a more suitable alliance? he asked himself, and the answer that he returned to his own questioning was perfectly satisfactory. He resolved to speak to her that very day.

In the mean time, Beatrice, serenely unconscious of the important event that was

impending, was talking with Cyril Meredith, to whom she had been introduced for the first time a few weeks ago.

"You are very much to be envied, Mr. Meredith," she said, with a smile.

"For my enjoyment of your companionship, yes," replied Meredith, with a gallantry that was sincere; no one could have been indifferent to such beauty; "for other things, what cause is there for envy?"

Beatrice looked surprised as she said, "Are you not a social 'lion,' one of the great objects of attraction? All society is talking about you—longing to make your acquaintance. What can there be more glorious than fame, the fame which you owe solely to your intellect? See how the world reverences it! See how the titled nobodies pay you homage! Why, at the present moment, you are of more consequence than a prime minister. And yet with the knowledge of this," she added, with a charming smile, "you say that you excite no envy."

"You have drawn a glowing picture," said Meredith, half sadly. "But it is one from which time may steal the present bright colours. I am popular because I am new, and I shall continue popular while the whim lasts, while I reign supreme in the unstable realms to the sovereignty of which I have aspired. To-morrow—I speak figuratively, of course—a rival may appear, who will have the additional recommendation of novelty to secure him favour in the eyes that are now bent approvingly on me; and then it will be the old cry, 'The king is dead, live the king.' The pedestal of literary popularity is an unsteady one."

"How bitter you are!" exclaimed Lady Beatrice, in a wondering tone. She could not understand these gloomy thoughts in a man who had achieved such success. "I thought it was only the unsuccessful who railed at fortune! Surely you must have found the applause of the world sweet?"

“ There is something sweeter than the applause of the world, Lady Beatrice.”

“ And that ?” asked his beautiful companion, with interest in her tone.

“ Is the admiration of those who knew and prized us before the world had it in its power to award or to withhold its praise ; who shared our youthful aspirations, our fervent fancies of a great future when fame seemed no nearer than the star which glistened o’er our head ; who sympathised with our early and unavailing struggles in a thorny path ; aye, watched them with an interest and a hope that were not weaker than our own, and who welcomed our triumph with tears of joy and gratitude. Believe me, Lady Beatrice, one tear from such a source outweighs all the cold plaudits of the world, which smiles on success, but frowns on failure.”

“ But, surely, you have experienced this, too ?” said Beatrice. “ There must, at least, have been one amongst those nearest to you to whom you could have turned in.

those days for sympathy and hope? Your mother! surely her woman's heart could not have refused such to an ambitious son?" she added, in a voice that seemed to express incredulity.

"Alas! Lady Beatrice, I never knew the meaning of a mother's love or a mother's sympathy. My parents died when I was a mere infant. In the relative who, by reason of that great loss, became my sole friend, I only found one who professed the greatest dislike to those pursuits to which my tastes led me. Mine, up to the present moment, has been a life remarkable for its joylessness. I have been compelled to be companion to myself, and all the bitter meaning of that companionship I trust you may never be compelled to learn. But the wish is almost needless. There is no parallel between our cases."

"Believe me, Mr. Meredith, when I say that had I imagined my heedless question would have given you such pain, I would not have put it," answered Beatrice, quickly, with

ready tact. She added, with a little sigh, "And, yet, I cannot but envy one who has achieved fame."

"Do you covet it for yourself that you are envious?" asked Meredith, smiling. It seemed to him very like ingratitude in a woman with her advantages to envy others in anything.

"Will you think me a weak, foolish woman, if I answer yes?" replied Beatrice, in a low voice, while a vivid blush overspread her cheek. "It is something, you will say, to be the inheritor of an ancient name, the possessor of great wealth; to know that I have it in my power to alleviate some of the misery which overflows this wide world. I should be grateful for all these rich gifts of fortune, and in truth I am. But sometimes, in the silence of my own heart, I cannot help desiring another lot, one in which I could have been something more than a mere cypher in the sum total of existence; something more important than a mere passing figure in the

panorama of a day—a simple woman, whose name is not known beyond a small world which is called society, whose ambition to be remembered by her kind can only be gratified in the narrow sphere of her native village !”

As she spoke thus, her radiant beauty sparkled with enthusiasm ; a proud light shone in her eyes, a deep glow dyed her fair cheeks ; every feature seemed animated with expression. For the moment Cyril could scarcely recover from the spell which that glowing beauty and musical voice seemed to cast upon him.

“ Have you never tried to give a definite form to your aspirations ?” he asked, gravely. “ There are many paths to distinction for men, but few on which a woman can set her feet. Still, the pen is a powerful weapon with which to force renown, and it can be wielded by either sex. Have you never sought the fame you covet so greatly by these means ?”

Again a blush rose to her cheek as she

made answer ; but this time it was the blush not of enthusiasm, but of mortification.

“I was afraid just now that you would think me weak and foolish when I made this confession. I am sure that even your politeness will not enable you to disguise your contempt for one who can aspire, but not perform ; who can only dream of climbing the hill of fame, and faints at the first step.”

There was sincerity, not unmingled with admiration, in Cyril Meredith’s manner, as he said—

“No, Lady Beatrice, you misjudge me greatly. I think as highly of you as if the world found each word you uttered a pearl of wisdom. Expression is given to few ; feeling to many. To such as you society owes much ; you are quiet, unobtrusive teachers ; your teaching often unsuspected by those whom it most benefits, but none the less conveying those lessons which it is well society should learn.”

"You say this to cure me of my foolish dreams."

"Nay, I was sincere in my praise," replied Meredith, smiling slightly at her determination not to be consoled with anything short of public fame. Then he said in a grave tone, "Still, I would not advise you to cherish these dreams, if there is no prospect of their being fulfilled. Is it not better to resolve at once to be contented with the world to which you belong? Content will come in time if you seek it. The literary crown, Lady Beatrice, is one beset with thorns ; but the crown of beauty does not bruise the brow that wears it. You are a queen in your own world. Let the homage that you have received, and will receive there, make you feel that you are powerful enough to dispense with envy."

Her lip curled scornfully as she replied.

"I will not be so affected as to pretend ignorance of the compliment that is conveyed in that advice. But, Mr. Meredith,

you have forgotten to describe of what elements the crowd is composed that worships at the shrine of beauty ; that renders this homage which I ought to consider sufficient compensation for the greater homage that I can never hope to command. Young dandies, whose profession it is to flatter—self-interested fortune-hunters many of them ! men of the world, who choose a wife as they would choose their horses or their furniture—for show ! I do not mean to deny that there are true and loyal hearts amongst them,” she said, quickly ; then added, in her former tone, “ But you can understand to what a girl in my position—the sole heiress of a wealthy father—is exposed. By what subtle analysis can I detect the true from the false in this promiscuous and general homage that I receive daily ?”

And Meredith answered very gravely, almost sternly ; for to him it seemed that the thorns in the path of this discontented beauty were not more plentiful than those

which line the humbler paths trodden by humbler women.

“The world, Lady Beatrice, is a show. Men and things seem what they are not; with more to hide than to show, their disguises are infinite. The true is distinguished from the false through much perplexity and trouble. Great self-sacrifice, large experience, and clear insight, are required to unravel the tangled skein of human existence. I own it is hard to have to constantly suspect; to find that honeyed words hide a base purpose, that self-interest assumes the mask of friendship, nay, even so far profanes the language of love as to take it for its own. But, Lady Beatrice, forgive me for saying that these are the penalties of your position. If you are rich in the possession of so many things which the humble have not, you cannot call it unjust that the peasant shall be wealthier in some respects than the princess. If you had rank, wealth, fame, happiness without a flaw, love without alloy, what would there be left for the poor?”

Those last words were spoken in an almost pathetic tone.

Lady Beatrice had sat with her eyes downcast during this speech, the justness of which she could not but perceive ; and it was in a half-penitent manner that she answered—

“ I fear I have deserved your rebuke. I am ashamed of my discontent, when I remember what burdens are borne by shoulders scarcely able to support them. Perhaps I have been foolish in exposing my weakness to a stranger. But I have known you so well through your writings,” she added, with a charming smile, “ that you do not seem a recent acquaintance.”

“ I trust, Lady Beatrice, that we shall be friends, and firm ones too, in the future,” replied Cyril Meredith warmly. He found it impossible to resist the fascination of this beautiful woman. “ I am convinced that we share many thoughts and feelings which are not the common property of the world, and in any society that knowledge would of

itself be a sufficient warrant for friendship. I see your father is coming toward us. I fear his arrival means an interruption to an interesting conversation."

"But you will see us again, soon," said Lady Beatrice quickly. "My father has, I know, given you a general welcome, and I heartily endorse it," she added, after a pause.

"Believe me, when I say that I will do my best to retain and deserve such friendship," was Meredith's answer. "Next time we meet, we can resume our interrupted discussion."

At that moment Lord Ravensworth joined them.

"I am sorry, Mr. Meredith, to take you away," he said, with a gracious smile; "but I cannot suffer my daughter to engross you to the exclusion of others. There are several here impatient to be introduced to you."

"I am quite at their service," said Cyril, with a bow to Beatrice.

"I know it is a great bore being 'lionized,' when you have got over the refreshing novelty of the position. At first it is intensely gratifying to one's vanity," continued the earl, adding in a jocular manner, "but the only consolation I can offer you is, that you have brought it upon yourself," and he smiled at his own joke.

"I do not complain, my lord ; I should be excessively ungrateful were I to do so, when I reflect how many there are who would willingly change places with me. For every man who succeeds even moderately, there are thousands who fail," answered Meredith, with a meaning smile to Lady Beatrice, whose conscious blush revealed that she guessed its playful satire.

"You see how meekly and with what a resigned spirit he accepts his destiny, papa," she said gaily. "Pray let him go through his 'lionizing' while he is in this tame mood."

And after they had left, Beatrice remained some time in the same spot,

musings gravely over her conversation with Cyril Meredith. "I feel that I have found at last a spirit with which my own can claim kindred"—so ran her soliloquy. "I could understand and sympathise with his thoughts although I could not give utterance to them. What a contrast to so many of the men I have known who have mistaken my smile of contempt at their shallowness for one of appreciation of their wit! Poor fellow! he said his life up to the present had been a joyless one. Mine has, at least, been different in that respect. I have always had in my dear father one indulgent friend to listen to my wayward fancies and idle dreams. I wonder what he thought of me? whether he considered me a weak, foolish woman? It is more probable that he did not waste a thought upon me. Well, I suppose I must go and play the hostess now, but I don't feel much in the mood for frivolous conversation." And with a little sigh, Lady Beatrice proceeded to mix again with her father's guests.

CHAPTER IV.

RENEWING OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

EDITH BARRINGTON and Geoffrey Elmore soon found an opportunity of indulging in that *tête-à-tête* for which both were secretly longing. There is always a certain amount of embarrassment between two persons who have parted as boy and girl and meet again as man and woman, and there was consequently at first a deal of stiffness in the demeanour of each. Geoffrey, who was by no means a bashful kind of mortal, appeared the first to recover from this depressing influence, and profiting by his good example, Edith, who was nothing if not natural, soon divested herself

of the remnant of the *gaucherie* which clung to her.

"So you have not altogether forgotten the old childish days, the rambles we took together, the plots we laid to circumvent the vigilance of our elders, the scrapes we too frequently fell into?" asked Elmore, after a pause.

"Of course not. Do you think I have no memory," replied Edith, with a certain coquetry in her manner of replying which a pretty woman knows how to assume by instinct, and which renders her adorable in the eyes of a lover.

"Young ladies forget many things when they come to London."

"And why should London teach them the art of forgetfulness so soon, Mr. Cynical?"

"Because they acquire a new philosophy there; because there they learn to form a different estimate of themselves: in a word, are made acquainted with the full extent of their power over our sex."

"Then I fear I have not benefited as I should have done by the teachings of the new philosophy. I have no better opinion of myself now than I had when I used to roam about in the country. You know better than any one if that was high enough," said Edith with a pretty smile.

Now, when a man has been cherishing a woman in his heart for three long years of absence, and he returns to find her superior in every respect to the mental portrait that he had painted, and listens to such a speech as this in which his old friendship is so gracefully referred to, it is easy to conceive that if he be a man of any sentiment whatever, his love must be intensified a hundred-fold. At that supreme moment, Geoffrey Elmore had great difficulty in suppressing the declaration that rose to his lips. But he suppressed it for two reasons, the first being a doubt that this might merely be a pretty and coquettish speech, and the second being a lingering suspicion that he might not be acting quite honourably in

endeavouring to ripen Edith's girlish regard for him into a feeling more serious. So he temporized, taking a middle line.

"But surely you have learned by practical experience it is here that a pretty girl can turn her beauty to its best advantage?"

"Oh, I have received compliments enough from men, one of whose pastimes it is to flatter any tolerably good-looking girl they meet, if that is what you mean. But then such compliments I estimate at their proper worth. I have a becoming sense of the value of old friends and old friendships. I do not forsake them for the new ones that may offer."

Here was encouragement enough certainly for any lover to speak. But still Geoffrey held his peace with rare unselfishness. He had not yet answered that question satisfactorily to his own conscience; the question of whether he was playing an honourable part in taking advantage of Edith's artless confessions. This time he was not prepared to reply.

She had answered his questions too frankly to justify any further jealous suspicions of the influences which he had fancied would prove hostile to his own chances. So they walked on for a little time in silence, which Edith, with true woman's tact, was the first to break.

"How delightful it must be to have riches!" she exclaimed suddenly. This was not the most pleasant speech for the ears of a lover whose only drawback was his poverty; but it is possible that she felt a little piqued at Geoffrey's apparent neglect of the opportunities she had afforded him. "How Lord Ravensworth is to be envied! two or three different houses in the country, and this beautiful villa to escape to for a few days when he is tired of the heat and dust of London."

"Riches do not always give happiness," said Geoffrey, gravely.

"Every one says that, I know," replied his companion; "but they go a long way towards it. I suppose I have such a re-

spect for wealth because I have never known it in my own person."

"Then you must never marry any but a wealthy man."

"I should marry a man I liked, whether he was rich or not," answered Edith, with a slight flush on her fair cheek. "If he *were* rich, so much the better; if poor, love must atone for his poverty."

"Do you really mean that?" asked Geoffrey, with eagerness in his voice.

"Of course I do. As I said just now, wealth goes a long way towards the making of happiness, but it cannot make it alone; and it is of no use if the heart remains unsatisfied. *That* must be satisfied the first," was Edith's answer.

There is no determining what answer Geoffrey would have made to this had not the sudden appearance of Lady Barrington warned him that the present was no time for love-making.

Lady Barrington was one of those commonplace easy-mannered women who take

care that the whole tenour of their conduct shall be in strict conformity with the laws of society, and of whom society from mere gratitude always speaks well. Her career had been blameless in every respect. She had married in obedience to the wishes of her parents, dutifully stifling any private inclinations which might have dictated a different choice; had made a most exemplary wife to the husband who had been selected for her, and was as exact in her maternal as in her conjugal duties, bestowing upon Edith's movements an attention for which that young lady was not always grateful.

Lady Barrington was not bad-hearted, but she was remarkably unsympathetic, this want of sympathy arising from incapacity to understand in others any emotion which she had never experienced herself. If you had formed an opinion of her character from her conversation alone, you would have judged her to be a most romantic person, one who would always

rather act from the heart than the head. She was a great reader and quoter of poetry, and professed great sympathy with love and lovers when they were treated in fiction : in practice she had little sympathy with a lover who could not reckon his income by thousands, in which case she could not comprehend how any well-brought-up girl could refuse him except for a better offer. It is almost needless to say that her ladyship was totally unconscious of the incongruity between her profession and her practice.

She greeted Elmore cordially, but with a certain reserve in her manner which expressed plainer than words could do that their acquaintance was not to be renewed on the old familiar footing ; that the distance from girl to woman had created a gulf which he could only cross at peril of her displeasure. Elmore perceived this readily, and that natural doggedness which prompts us to persevere in a direction where the opposition comes not from our

own scruples but from those of others, began to rise up and mutiny against his former honourable resolve.

As soon as the mother and daughter were alone, Lady Barrington lost not a moment in making her meaning as clear as possible.

"I shall be very glad to see Geoffrey Elmore at our house, if his visits are made at proper intervals, my dear Edith," she said in that suave voice which with her always concealed a most resolute purpose. "But of course, you can perceive without my help the impropriety of being as familiar with him as you were when a mere girl. I like him very much, but he is far too poor to be ever regarded in the light of a probable suitor."

"Well, mamma, we need not despise poverty; we are poor enough ourselves," answered Edith a little crossly. Lady Barrington had not displayed her usual tact in broaching the subject so quickly.

"All the more reason why you should

not unite yourself to a poor man. But seriously speaking, Edith, I trust you have no feeling for Geoffrey ; for I warn you that I could not for an instant countenance —”

“ How absurd to jump at conclusions so rashly, mamma. You will not be called upon to countenance anything of the kind.”

“ I am truly glad you have relieved my apprehensions,” replied her ladyship. “ And while we are upon this subject, Edith, I must beg that you will show a little more politeness to Talbot Champion.”

“ I detest Talbot Champion,” said Edith angrily to her mother’s request.

“ I must warn you once again against indulging in these foolish prejudices. There is nothing to detest in Mr. Champion ; on the contrary, he possesses remarkable advantages. He is handsome —”

“ Oh yes ! I will grant his features are perfect — in expressing neither soul nor sentiment,” interrupted Edith quickly.

“ You are talking nonsense,” replied her

mother angrily. "His powers of amusing are considerable; he has plenty of conversation."

"That is to say he steals the worst ideas of others, and attempts to make them pass for his own," cried Edith.

"Edith, you are flippant and impertinent at the same time," said her mother, with more temper in her voice than she usually allowed to appear. "If I knew that Talbot Champion had proposed, and you had refused him, your folly would almost break my heart."

"And I should break mine if I accepted him," answered Edith.

Lady Barrington did not pursue the subject after that remark. She perceived that her daughter was in one of those moods for which silence is the surest and swiftest cure. Obedient to her mother's commands, as Edith generally proved herself, there were occasions similar to the present on which she displayed a spirit that made her ladyship tremble, and aroused the dreadful

thought that she might one day act contrary to all the Barrington traditions, by taking her destiny into her own hands.

So Lady Barrington wisely avoided for the present further discussion on so embarrassing a topic, trusting that when Edith's present mutinous spirit had subsided, her natural good sense would come to her aid, and enable her to appreciate the soundness of those arguments which had been employed for her sole benefit. And Edith, who was not as yet prepared to totally emancipate herself from maternal control, soon recovered herself sufficiently to perceive that she was acting unwisely in allowing the prejudices against Geoffrey Elmore to take a deeper root. So, when Talbot Champion came up to her, and exerted his powers of small-talk for her amusement, she listened to him with a gracious condescension that was balm to her mother's wounded feelings, and which sent her admirer away in the seventh heaven of bliss. But all the while that Mr. Talbot

Champion fancied his agreeable manners were making this favourable impression on her, she was thinking of the old days when she and Geoffrey had no interdict placed upon their friendship.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNWELCOME SUITOR.

"MR. MEREDITH seems to be the magnet that is attracting the smaller atoms of your party. I should think this species of hero-worship must be as distasteful as it is absurd."

The speaker was Lord Warton. He held literary men very low in the scale of public utility. Beatrice answered him in her most sarcastic manner.

"To a person so dignified as your lordship, who considers all display of enthusiasm a sign of vulgarity, I have not the least doubt such homage would be exceedingly distasteful. I can only hope, for your own

sake, that you will never be so plebeian as to do anything that may deserve it !”

Lord Warton was, happily, the least sensitive of men ; wrapped in his armour of indifference, ridicule could find no weak spot against which to discharge a shaft. He smiled very good-humouredly at her satirical speech, as he answered—

“ Ha, ha, very good ! That is really very witty. I have never heard you say anything better. But, seriously speaking, it seems to me a very absurd spectacle—a host of people rushing after a man in this fashion, because he happens to have written a few thousand lines in rhyme. I am sure I do not appeal to your common sense in vain, Lady Beatrice, when I ask you to take my view of the matter.”

“ Even at the risk of forfeiting my reputation for common sense in the eyes of so accomplished a critic as Lord Warton, I must confess I do not see this question in the same light,” replied Beatrice, with an elaborate irony that was lost on him.

“ Ah, I forgot. You are a great admirer of poetry, and, therefore, poets find in you a warm advocate,” said Warton easily, perfectly unconscious of the contempt in which she held his opinion. “ In that case I will not breathe a word against them.”

“ You perceive, Lord Warton, that I am vulgar enough to have a large share of that quality which you so despise—enthusiasm !”

“ You are too severe upon me. It is not a quality which I desire for myself, certainly ; but I do not, of necessity, deprecate it in others. Besides,” he added, assuming an air of great gallantry, “ everything in Lady Beatrice is charming.” Searching about in his practical mind for something still more complimentary, he continued, “ What would be unbecoming in others is refined in her.”

“ You flatter me, my lord,” she replied, in a contemptuous tone. “ There are, no doubt, many among my acquaintance here to-day, to whom praise from Lord Warton

would be indeed sweet. But I have the bad taste to dislike compliments."

Warton perceived what he might have seen before, if he had contemplated his own merits less, and other persons' idiosyncracies more, that flattery was not likely to subdue such a nature. This recent knowledge prompted him, therefore, to eschew all preliminaries.

"Then I will not hazard another compliment in what I am about to say to you now. Lady Beatrice, I am not sure that I am choosing the most auspicious occasion for this declaration, but love should be free to speak at any time. You cannot have been ignorant of the feelings with which your beauty and accomplishments have inspired me. Am I too presumptuous in daring to hope that my suit may not prove distasteful to you? You know the worldly advantages which I possess: a name as ancient as your own, an ample fortune. In these respects, I am not an unworthy

suitor. For the rest, you alone can be the arbiter of your own feelings."

There was no lover-like warmth in this declaration—no modulation of tone that could reveal the tenderness within. It was the practical offer of a practical man, and he spoke it much as if he were stating a problem to which there could be only one obvious solution.

Dignity was mingled with grace and sweetness in the reply of Beatrice : a reply that her self-elated suitor had scarcely anticipated.

"Believe me, Lord Warton, I am grateful for the compliment you have paid me : the highest that a man can pay to the woman he honours with his admiration. I wish it were in my power to return a favourable answer to your suit, but we cannot control the heart. And you would despise me, I should hold myself degraded if I gave you my hand without it."

Surprised as he was at that answer, he had sufficient self-control to conceal it.

"I need not tell you how deeply I regret your decision," he said coldly, "but since you have so determined, I will not press my unwelcome suit upon you."

"That is generous of you," said Beatrice, extending her hand. "Let us forget this passage in our lives, and only remember for the future that we have been friends."

He took her proffered hand, bowed stiffly and walked away. But it was a severe wound to his self-esteem that a woman should have it in her power to say she had rejected him. His secret was safe with her, he knew, but it was one that would prove humiliating to himself.

"Can she love another?" he thought to himself. "Some penniless younger son; some gay Lothario overwhelmed with debt, perhaps? If so, her chivalrous notions of duty would compel her to keep her promise even to the destruction of her own happiness. I, of all men, to make one more in the list of conquests by this haughty beauty. But, Beatrice, I am not easily

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foiled. It is possible you may be Lady Warton yet," he exclaimed half triumphantly, as he left the place where he had received such a crowning humiliation.

A few minutes after his departure, Lord Ravensworth and Meredith joined Beatrice.

"I have prevailed on Mr. Meredith to visit us at Cheverton. I do not know whether he would wish its *chatelaine* to repeat the invitation," said her father.

"I have already given him a general invitation ; in that this event must be included. Still, if this sounds ungracious, I will add that it possesses some natural beauties which a poet should not miss."

"One thing alone is required to make the prospect complete," was Meredith's answer, "and that is, Lady Beatrice for my guide to them."

"I think I can promise that," said Beatrice with a slight blush.

At that instant a servant advanced with a telegram for Meredith.

"This is from the doctor who is attend-

ing my aunt," he said after hastily perusing it. "He tells me to start for Kent without delay. We shall meet again at Cheverton if I do not return to London before you leave."

CHAPTER VI.

CYRIL MEREDITH'S RELATIVE.

CYRIL MEREDITH lost no time in setting out on his journey to Kent. The bond of affection between himself and the guardian of his youth was a very slight one, but such a summons as he had received was not to be neglected. The journey was a short one, and the time went very quickly, for his thoughts were busily occupied in traversing over all the incidents of the past, from the day when he had first dreamed of making a name in literature to the present which found him famous—that dream of his youth amply fulfilled.

He went back to the first dawns of

that ambition, when he had come to understand what a world of hidden beauty lies unfolded to the poet's ken : what a world of slumbering music wakens to the poet's magical touch, breathing in perfect concord with the spirit-tones within. He had dared, boy as he was, conscious of nothing save a rude power, to claim a kindred with the singers of the world, trusting to time to bring him due inspiration, to strengthen his feeble touch, till he gave a fit expression to that music of the soul, and the world would pause to listen to one more son of song : and this yearning to be greater, and in one vast stride to span the distance which divides the greatest from the least, seemed to graft new strength within him, and make him eager to overleap all those barriers before which weaker souls have staggered and fallen.

He set his foot upon the thorny path that leads to fame, and learned for the first time all the bitterness of that incessant strife without which no man reaches the

goal. Elated one moment by some petty victory, only to be crushed the next by some disastrous defeat : pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow, playing with life as if it were a bubble; hope pointing with inspiring finger to the dim to-morrow that dawns and finds you not a step farther on the toilsome road.

And, more bitter spectacle than any, he saw many of his rivals pass him, arrive at the goal which he was nearing with such infinite pain. Was it to be wondered at that the sickness of his spirit found its only vent in bitter self-questioning as he watched them, smiling serenely from the victors' resting-place : that sometimes he began to doubt the wisdom of his perseverance ; to ask himself whether his blind trust in the future was not something akin to the faith of the Hindoo zealot, who adores the cruel spirit that crushes out his life under the iron wheels of his ruthless car, repaying his devotion with the most ignominious and barbarous of deaths.

Often he was tempted to think that there was some secret pathway known to more fortunate men than he was, which had taken them past his plodding, and brought them to that which he could see only dimly and afar off. Often was he moved to exclaim that the crown of merit, that he so yearned to place upon his brow before he should die, must be dropped by chance and not design from the hands of a blind fate. Perhaps the dubious answer which his heart returned to its own questioning, might have led him—growing every day more doubtful of the intellectual instinct that had first prompted him—into a life of mild inaction that refrained from overtasking brain or spirit, in stagnation quenching all the hopes of youth. But the moment that he had half-resolved to give up the struggle, he remembered the cold distrust and sneers of those who disbelieved in his talent and smiled at the thought of his success : in such a moment they came back to his memory, stinging him to intenser

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action, and testing the steadfastness of his soul.

The result was that he only clung the closer to the fond hopes that others despised—would have trampled into the dust beneath the hard heel of their scorn. Nay, in such a moment, he seemed to rise from that cold scorning to the heights of self-elation, to feel his spirit towering grandly still above all obstacles; till he had nerved it anew, wrapped it, so to speak, in the strong contentment of a man who *feels* the promise of which others take no heed, which a moment's inspiration will complete to full achievement, and beneath the searching light of triumph even the blindest can see to read at last. In time that inspiration came, came almost without his knowing, like a sudden flash of lightning leaping in untroubled skies; and he saw the end of waiting, felt that the time had dawned for proving all the fulness of that promise which the world would not despise.

He was certain that he had at last found a subject which would bring to light all his hidden capacity ; as he wrote in his lonely chamber he felt his thoughts dilating to an intellectual height unreachd before, his words seemed full of power as he fixed them on the page. And when he read over his work before sending it forth to the world, he knew that he had at last produced something that would live. He could anticipate the applause of his readers, and the critics' gracious words of praise, and see himself in thrilling contact with the goal that he had so passionately yearned to reach.

He saw all things more clearly now, for his triumph lent him assistance to discover many reasons for his former failures ; helped him to comprehend all the meaning of that distance which divides a mind maturing from a mind that is matured. Men forget this in their fervour of contempt for patient waiting, and mistaking mere impulse for strength, venture forth to fail ignominiously ; fail, and live to find that that one great

failure has exhausted all their strength, and left them powerless to renew the strife—pilgrims weary of existence ere they have travelled half its length, with a spirit crushed and broken, that finds nothing fair or good left in their world of sorrow.

Once having scaled the heights of renown, the path that lay before him henceforth was pleasant enough, one strewn with roses. His genius brought him many and distinguished friends ; he was overwhelmed with invitations to some of the best houses in London. He was by no means indifferent to the sweets of fame—he was one of those men who are stimulated by applause. He was not like many men of genius, perfectly indifferent to the plaudits of the world so long as their work satisfies themselves ; singers who serenely sing, like the simple nightingales, from the pure love of their art.

There was only one drawback to his perfect contentment—the obscurity of his birth. Illustrious descent could not have

added another wreath to his chaplet, it is true ; but it was not so much the humbleness as the obscurity of his origin that so galled him, when a chance word happened to touch upon that sore subject. The information that he had gathered from his aunt was of the briefest and most unsatisfactory nature. His father and mother had died abroad, she told him, and had left him to her charge.

“ But where did my parents come from? Have I no relatives living but yourself?” he had asked her more than once.

Her answer had always been the same. “ Your father and mother were Gloucestershire people ; your father lost all his money there in farming, and went abroad to better himself, with very little success. You have no living relative except myself. There may be some distant cousins scattered about somewhere, but I do not know them and they would not know me.”

His childhood had been a singularly joyless one, as he had told Lady Beatrice.

He was put to a school near to his aunt's house:—her means were too limited to send him away, she had told him. Thanks to his own industry, and the assistance of the master, who took a fancy to him, he left with an education not much inferior to that which he would have acquired at a public school. On finishing his education he came up to London to procure employment as a tutor; while he was engaged in this search, which his want of a University career rendered very difficult, he made the acquaintance of a journalist named Markham. This new friend, one of those jovial, good-natured men, who are always ready to help and advise their fellow-creatures, suggested to him the literary profession as one quite as profitable, and allowing of more freedom than was possible in a tutor's existence. Markham was a man of considerable interest in his world, and he found no difficulty in getting Meredith enough work to bring him in a fair subsistence. This was Cyril Meredith's first

introduction to literature, and it was not long before, weary of his position as an anonymous writer, he began to nurse the ambition of attempting a higher flight. Markham, without absolutely discouraging him, did not give him much hope. But one day, when the young aspirant had submitted to him a composition, of which he felt more than usually proud, the veteran threw aside his neutral manner, and exhorted him to persevere.

"There is genius in that," he cried, enthusiastically, "genius that, you must forgive me for speaking the truth, my dear boy, I never suspected you of possessing. Persevere by all means, it would be intellectual suicide to give up now. Talent is sure to make its way in the end. I won't say that the end is very near, for I've seen too much of that waiting and hoping to feel over-sanguine, but it must come some day, and Cyril Meredith will be a poet, of whose acquaintance many will be proud."

After this kindly speech, Markham was

the critical friend, on whom Cyril relied for consolation in many a dark hour of despair.

It was in these reveries that the time passed so quickly on his journey. He was met in the hall of his aunt's house by the doctor, who informed him that shortly after the telegram had been despatched, a change had taken place for the better, but that she must not be disturbed that night: in the morning she would probably be able to see him.

"The fit was a most severe one, and when I despatched that telegram I had no idea that you would see her alive," added the man of medicine, "but now I can pronounce her completely out of danger."

The next morning Cyril was allowed to go into his aunt's room. It was easy to discover that in her youth Ruth Meredith must have been remarkably handsome, but the lines about the face, and the perpetual gloom on the brow, told of inward and

secret causes that had worn away that beauty, till there remained of it only the faint traces of what had been. She gave her nephew her usual kiss of greeting, but in that kiss there was no more warmth than if it had come from the lips of the merest stranger.

"I have been very near death, the doctor tells me," she said, speaking in a voice that was wonderfully firm, considering how recent had been her illness. "He acted to the best of his judgment in sending for you; but as things have happened, I am sorry that he brought you from pleasanter scenes."

It would have been hypocrisy for Cyril Meredith to pretend that he had any real love for his aunt. She had too early repressed all evidences and signs of affection in his boyhood, but that strange speech touched a chord of pity in his sensitive nature, and he said quickly—

"My dear aunt, how can you cherish so unnatural an idea? I should be a monster of ingratitude, if I had no feeling for the

only relative I have in the world, the only one between whom and myself there is a tie of blood."

"Ay, they say that blood is thicker than water," said Ruth Meredith slowly. "And yet we hear of unnatural things done by one's own flesh and blood; brothers cheating each other out of their father's inheritance: sisters permitting their sisters' children to starve; mothers killing their own children to get a paltry burial fee. Who shall dare to say that blood is thicker than water, when one hears and reads of such things?"

Cyril did not attempt to answer her question. His aunt's thoughts and conversation had always been of a gloomy cast, and he reflected that her recent illness was not likely to impart a more cheerful colour to either. She remained silent for a few moments, as if she were pursuing the subject of her meditations privately; then she said abruptly—

"Tell me something of yourself. I

read your name often in the papers, as the guest of great men whose invitations confer honour." She delivered the last few words in a more scornful tone.

"I have been successful, and I am now reaping the fruits of my success," replied Cyril. "I am a unit in the sum total of society."

"And you like this new life, this mixing with people who are so much your superiors in station?" she asked, regarding him keenly.

"I do," said Cyril, with a faint flush rising to his cheek at that reference to station. "I have no fancy for an obscure existence."

"Your ambition is fully gratified, then," exclaimed Ruth, almost sternly. "But beware of these aristocrats, Cyril Meredith. Mingle with them, employ their influence to your own advantage, but do not *trust* them. They have no sympathies in common with you or the class to which you belong. They will flatter you, smile on

you, so long as it suits their purpose ; but they will throw you off like a worn-out glove when their whim is satisfied."

" My dear aunt, why this dislike to a class of which you know nothing ?"

" I *have* known them, aye, too well ; learned the depth of their treachery and falseness, as you will learn some day if you trust them too far," replied his aunt, angrily. " But I cannot expect an old head like mine on young shoulders. You have intellect, Cyril, and I have not, but I have seen more of the baseness of human nature than you. But let us talk no more on this subject. Tell me, where have you been lately ? Let me hear about yourself and your own movements."

" I was at a garden party given by the Earl of Ravensworth at his villa at Twickenham yesterday, and the telegram reached me there."

" Has he any family, this Lord Ravensworth ?"

" One daughter, Lady Beatrice Neville,"

answered Cyril, a slight flush rising to his cheek, provoked by the keen gaze fastened upon him.

"Is she handsome?" asked Ruth, with a suspicious glance.

"Very beautiful," was Cyril's answer.

"Take care, Cyril Meredith, that she is not *too* beautiful for your peace!"

"For mine!" said her nephew, colouring deeply; "Do you think I am mad to entertain such folly? I, a poor poet, think of aspiring to the love of one of England's wealthiest and proudest daughters?"

"Again I warn you to take care. Do not go too often where she is. You may be mad enough to love if you are not bold enough to woo. Beauty is a powerful enchantress if its possessor be a simple peasant girl, but it is irresistible in those like this Lady Beatrice who unite with it the refinement and the thousand nameless graces which are the prerogatives of her class."

"Do not distress yourself, my dear aunt,

I do not intend to court the misery you prophesy for me. Between Lady Beatrice and myself there yawns a social gulf which I *cannot* and she *would* not cross."

Cyril stayed with his aunt for three days. Before that time she was well enough to resume her usual active habits, and she was the first to urge her nephew to return without delay to town.

"You have had enough of village life," she said to him with a certain pathos in her voice. "You have worked your way into a higher existence without help from a soul, and it is not fair that you should be deprived *of an hour of it*. I will let you know in a few days how I am progressing. Your staying here longer will only vex me."

After that, Cyril made up his mind to leave. Before quitting the house, his aunt took him to her room, and pointing to a small davenport in the window, said in a sharp, distinct tone. "If anything happens to me suddenly, and you cannot get to me in time, you will find some papers of great

import in that second drawer. Do not forget."

As he was going through the hall, the old servant who had lived with Ruth for years, took him aside and whispered mysteriously.

"There must be something wrong with Miss Ruth's head, Mr. Cyril. For three nights afore she was took with the fit, she was walking about her room half the night. Depend upon it, she's got something that's weighing on her mind."

CHAPTER VII.

A SACRED TRUST.

WHEN Meredith arrived at his chambers on his return from Kent he found a note from his friend Markham awaiting him. It was couched in the following language : " Dear Cyril. If the grandees can spare you for one night, dine with us to-day at six o'clock. We meet to celebrate the triumph of genius over the barbarian foes who dispute her sovereignty." Cyril smiled at the whimsical style of the epistle, which it was too late to answer otherwise than in person. Mr. Markham's house was at Brixton, a small, unpretentious villa, for his means were limited.

Caleb Markham was a man of those varied talents which are more often a hindrance than a help, as they prevent the concentration of one's whole efforts in any particular direction. He had written plays, a novel, poems for magazines, travels; he could turn his pen to almost any kind of literature, and yet with all these abilities, the outside public had never heard of his name. A natural lack of energy, a disposition to live in the present and let the future take care of itself, was at the root of his inability to grasp for himself any measure of fame. He would occasionally display great fits of enthusiasm, devise great plans for the morrow, but when the morrow came he had cooled down and they were never put into execution. He preferred to earn his money by quick work, such as magazine or newspaper articles to more earnest efforts which would demand time and patience.

His wife had died young, leaving him with one daughter, Mabel, of whom he

was passionately fond and proud. But even his pride in his "little queen" as he used to call her could not tempt him to rescue them both from the Bohemian life into which he had unconsciously drifted. He had allowed her to be taught painting at her earnest request, for Mabel was a girl who hated idleness, and there was very little to employ her in their hum-drum life. She knew very few of her own sex, and amongst her father's companions she had found no one except Cyril Meredith, who was a pleasant associate for a young girl.

Both father and daughter welcomed his arrival with singular heartiness. Mabel Markham was a remarkably pretty girl with rich golden hair, and beautiful blue eyes that her father was never tired of praising.

"You want to know the reason of this feast. I will explain it to you in as few words as possible," said Markham, going to an easel and showing a picture, the subject of which was the balcony scene from *Juliet*. You have seen this before?"

"Of course I have," answered Cyril with a smile at his friend's whimsical manner. Mabel was blushing in the rear.

"Of course you have, and as a poet, you recognised in it the hand of a genius akin to your own. But very few picture dealers have a poetical soul. I might have gone to twenty commonplace, vapid hucksters who had never thirsted for a drop from the pure Heliconian fount, and they would have crushed me with their critical jargon, and gradually have explained away every merit that the picture possessed. But it was my good fortune, sir, to meet with a dealer of real critical acumen. He looked at it with the glance of a man who understood the inner mysteries of art, and he offered my daughter thirty guineas on the spot. My daughter accepted it: the picture is sold."

"Let me congratulate you, Mabel," said Cyril, shaking her warmly by the hand.

"Thirty guineas!" repeated Caleb Markham, "a contemptible, I might almost say an

insulting sum for such a treasure. I told him as much, and he quailed before my eye as I said it. He excused himself on the score of the degeneracy of the public taste. I admitted the plea, condoled with him on the degeneracy, and handed his cheque to Mabel."

"You did very wisely, papa," said Mabel with a charming smile.

"My daughter has, therefore, earned thirty guineas by her talents, and considers herself on the high road to fortune. Nothing then will do but she must celebrate the occasion with a *recherché* dinner at her own expense."

"You need not have put that in," interrupted his daughter.

"Such generosity should not blush unseen," answered her father in a firm tone.

"I will not prophesy that the banquet will be Olympian either in its splendour or profusion. We have champagne in prospect, but it will probably not be of the quality that could readily suggest nectar.

But harmony will preside at our board, and if all the accounts we read of Juno be true, that element was often lacking at the table of the mighty Thunderer."

In this whimsical way did Caleb Markham run on until dinner was announced, when he assumed a more dignified demeanour, and motioned to Cyril and Mabel to lead the way to the dining-room. A slight diversion was created by his requesting that the picture should be brought into the room, in order that they might preserve a lively and grateful recollection of the source from which the blessings they were at present enjoying had proceeded.

"We will have no philosophical discussions, no lugubrious speculations upon this auspicious day," he exclaimed, as he quaffed his first glass of champagne; "Mirth shall claim every moment of our attention. To the success of the artist; may she make veteran R.A.'s expire with envy. Meredith, join with me in this pious toast. It is your duty as a guest."

Thus exhorted, Cyril complied readily with the request, to the amusement of Mabel.

"Small beginnings make large endings," continued Markham, on whom the good cheer was beginning to take effect, "I remember the time when I jumped for joy to see my first poetical effusion in the county newspaper. I have lived to see editors imploring an article from me. Let me tell you, I don't despair of my little queen's future." His eyes glistened with pride as he looked at her.

"Take heart from my history, Mabel," said Meredith; "think how many years I waited before I could convert the world to the good opinion I entertained of myself."

"Begone, dull care! Not a word of weariness in our vocabulary to-day," cried Markham, heartily; "The path before us is strewn with roses. Do not take from us our power of dreaming roseate dreams. Talent without energy, energy without talent, the result is failure. Combine the two, and they turn into glorious success."

They were silent for some time. In spite of his exhortation to cheerfulness, it is possible that Markham was picturing how different his lot might have been had he possessed that one qualification—energy. But a serious mood was never lasting with a man of his mercurial temperament, and filling himself another glass of the divine nectar, as he styled it, he imparted a fresh stimulus to the conversation.

“Tell me, thou latest representative of Apollo, whose privilege it is to enter the saloons of the great, and be surfeited with compliments from the lips of high-born beauty, does more true happiness preside at the banquets of the wealthy than at this humble entertainment? Speak the truth, as thou valuest sincerity!”

“I can only say that I would not exchange it for the banquets you mention.”

“Spoken like a true son of Apollo,” exclaimed Markham; adding in a more serious voice, “ah, Meredith, not in the glare and glitter of fashion, but in the

lowly vales and sequestered corners of life does your true poet find his most fitting themes. But talking of poetry, my little Queen here has got a surprise in store for you. She recites your poem of the "Last Meeting" splendidly. I had no idea of her powers of elocution myself until the other day. Mabel, my darling, give it us now."

"Papa, how unkind of you to tell that," answered Mabel, blushing vividly. "You know, Cyril, I admire that more than any of your pieces, and I was foolish enough to recite it the other day before him, little thinking that he intended to betray me."

"Nay, but you must pay the penalty of his indiscretion now," said Meredith, good-humouredly. "Don't be bashful, Mabel, I am not a formidable critic."

Thus abjured, Mabel walked to the other end of the room and began her recitation in a low voice. Nervousness evidently impeded the full display of her ability at first, but she grew more confident by

degrees ; and as the beauties of the poem dawned upon and engrossed her, the audience was forgotten. Her mellow, flexible voice interpreted with rare skill every phase of emotion, and when she finished, it was amidst a silence that expressed more than the most vigorous plaudits.

Cyril was the first to recover from the spell which her exquisite rendering had cast over him. "I can only say that the poem stands higher in the author's estimation since you have recited it so beautifully," was his praise.

"Did I exaggerate my little Queen's gifts ?" asked Markham triumphantly.

"No, indeed. No praise could exaggerate them," replied Cyril warmly.

"Do you think I should make a good actress ?" questioned Mabel demurely.

"I do ; but I should be sorry to see you an actress all the same."

"Better keep to the painting, Mabel. It is more respectable," added her father.

"Respectable!" echoed Mabel, scornfully. "What greater triumph can there be than that of the gifted actress; to give an interpretation of a character that holds the audience spell-bound; to elucidate each subtle point that was never discovered by others; to listen to the plaudits of the house that was a moment ago hushed into breathless silence by the display of your genius? On the boards is true triumph; there you are a conqueror holding men's passions in subjection to your will." The flush that had risen to her cheek at the beginning of her enthusiastic speech had died away to paleness as she perceived Cyril Meredith's gaze fixed upon her with a somewhat pitying expression. "You think my ambition is not ladylike, I suppose?" she said with a faint smile.

"I think you are like a great many outsiders, dazzled by false glitter," said Meredith kindly. "You paint the rosy side of an actress's life. You do not pause to consider the prejudices she must overcome,

the envy of rivals ; the hundred and one obstacles in the path to success."

"What career is without those obstacles?" asked Mabel quickly.

"True. Perhaps I should find some difficulty in defending my opinion. But I must own I should hear with regret that any friend of mine in whom I took an interest, had exhibited herself upon a public stage for hire. Answer me, Markham, is it a career you would choose for your daughter?"

"I cannot say that it is," answered Markham after a moment's reflection. "I have no inherited pride or prejudices upon this matter. My father designed me for a farmer ; nature intended me for a *littérateur*. I have raked in the field of literature instead of in the field of nature ; the harvests are not very golden in either profession I fear. But I would not like to see my little Queen an actress while I could earn a crust for her, or she could earn one for herself in anything different. You are

stage-struck, Mabel. I had the fever myself when I was a boy. I thought what a fine thing it must be to strut about as Richard. I am tempted to laugh at it sometimes now."

Mabel had two against her, so she did not attempt to argue the question, but proposed an adjournment to the drawing room, where she sang them song after song with the same exquisite taste that had marked her recitation. When Cyril rose to leave, his host took him into the dining-room, and shutting the door carefully, came up to him with a grave expression on his face.

"I want you to promise me one thing, Meredith," he said.

"Granted before you ask it," answered Cyril, taking his hand.

"I want you to promise me that if anything happens to me, and my little Queen is left alone in the world, you will supply, as far as you can, my place."

"I promise it most solemnly," answered Meredith in a grave voice.

"I have not told her of it, but it may happen sooner than we think. My doctor has told me that I have got disease of the heart, and that I may drop down dead any moment. If I do so, Mabel has not got a relative left. So I confide her to you as a sacred charge. You have known her from childhood; you know her character and temper as well as I do. So act by her that if we meet in another world I may thank you for your care of my darling child." Cyril's answer was a close pressure of his friend's hand, and with another good-night, they parted.

It was such a splendid night that Cyril walked home. As he passed the clock of the House of Commons, it struck eleven; turning round into Parliament Street, he found himself by the side of the Earl of Burnley who recognised him immediately.

"Good night, Mr. Meredith," said the old nobleman cordially. "I have just come from listening to the debate in the House of Commons. I waited to hear my son

“speak, and when he had finished I had heard enough. Are you walking my way? if so, give me the pleasure of your company.”

Cyril offered his arm to the earl, and they strolled along together, when they arrived at his house, he pressed Cyril to enter. “The world of fashion is only just beginning its revels,” he said. “Let you and I finish our discussion here.” Cyril complied with his request, and they talked till late in the night. When he rose to leave, the earl thanked him courteously for his visit.

“Come and see me very often if you can spare the time, Mr. Meredith,” he said. “I am an old man, and go into society very seldom. Contact with such a mind as yours is, I assure you, a privilege to me.”

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHANCE MEETING.

SIGNS that the close of the season was near at hand were multiplying fast. The *prime donne* had warbled their last strains, bills were being hurriedly passed through the House of Commons, or abandoned altogether, in order that members might get away in time to slaughter the grouse; the principal streets were crossable in the middle of the day. Many had already taken their flight from the dusty metropolis, and those who still lingered behind were preparing to follow their example.

Rotten Row had lost to a considerable extent its usual animated appearance on the

morning that Mr. Richard Harwood, dismounting with great deliberation from the steady-going cob that had carried him up and down several times, prepared to join the pedestrians. The first person he met was Geoffrey Elmore.

“Good morning, Mr. Harwood! I have been observing you for some time on that respectable cob of yours, who seems to consider it an insult when you urge him into a trot. You would certainly not witch the world with feats of noble horsemanship on that animal,” he cried, with a smile.

“My days of noble horsemanship are passed. *Non sum qualis eram*. I am not what I was when George the Third was king. What an intensely modern fellow that Horace is, by the way; you can quote from him more aptly than from half of the poets of the present day,” replied Mr. Harwood, who had that weakness for classical quotation which is observable in many gentlemen of the old school. “But talking of other matters, I suppose you

intend, like myself, to seek fresh woods and pastures new ?”

“Yes, my first visit is to Lord Ravensworth, at Cheverton.”

“My destination also,” said Mr. Harwood; adding, “but how comes it that you have received an invitation from people of whom you know so little ?”

“I must have made an agreeable impression upon the host and his fair daughter.”

“Vain dog !” answered Harwood ; “but, no, Master Geoffrey, that will not deceive me. I have known you since you were the height of my stick, and I know every turn of your ingenuous countenance. There have been other influences at work, if I mistake not, in that invitation. Edith Barrington is an old friend of yours, Lady Beatrice is the bosom friend of Edith. Edith suggests that you would like to admire the beauties of Cheverton, and thus the thing is accomplished. Your guilty expression proves the sagacity of my method of reasoning.

Geoffrey Elmore, you are an excellent young man, but you would make a very poor actor."

"You are too sharp, Mr. Harwood," said Geoffrey, with an awkward smile.

"I wish for your sake, my dear boy, that I were the only person at Cheverton likely to comprehend the true position of affairs," he said kindly. "But Lady Barrington is a dragon in petticoats, and watches Edith with the vigilance of a hen over her only chicken. If I can help you to frustrate the old campaigner, I shall only be too happy, for your father was one of the best friends I ever had, and I should like to assist his son to a good wife. I don't think on the whole that you could make a better choice than Edith; she is a good little girl, and would be better still if she were removed from her mother's influence."

"You don't speak very kindly of her ladyship, considering she always displayed so much politeness towards yourself."

"My dear boy," replied Harwood, with

his cynical smile, "I am an old man, tolerably well off; Lady Barrington is an old woman, though she would hate you to her dying day if she knew that you had called her so, with a very limited income. I do not speak from vanity—I was never vain when I was your age, and I am sure I am not going to begin when I am close upon sixty, but I have supplied you with the premises, draw the deduction yourself."

Elmore only smiled at his friend's interpretation of her ladyship's politeness.

"But as I said just now, if I can assist you in any way to the accomplishment of your object, I shall only be too happy," resumed Harwood, "I will draw off Lady Barrington's attention from your innocent conversations and rambles; I will listen respectfully to her sentimental disquisitions; I will not even protest when she assigns a verse of Pope to Shakespeare, and a verse of Shakespeare to Tom Moore. In a word I will do everything I can to serve you,

except ask her to change her name to Harwood. Can friendship go further?"

"How can I express my gratitude?" said Elmore warmly.

"In the way that is adopted by most persons, by forgetting the service the moment after it is rendered," answered his friend with a grim chuckle. But after this cynical reflection, he relapsed into his former geniality; the fact is, he felt extremely happy; the idea of serving a friend he liked at the expense of an acquaintance he despised was one peculiarly acceptable to a man of his peculiar temperament.

"Remember, then, that we have pledged ourselves to an alliance against the common enemy," he said, as he prepared to remount the dignified cob; "I force her to abandon the strongholds which you at once occupy. *Au revoir.*"

Lady Beatrice Neville came riding by presently with a large party, amongst whom was Cyril Meredith. Her gaze fol-

lowed his own as he raised his hat to a young lady standing by the railings with a gentleman presumably her father.

"What a pretty girl!" she exclaimed involuntarily.

"She is the daughter of one of my best friends; in fact, I might say, *the* best friend; the man to whom I owe my first introduction to literature; and, consequently, whatever small measure of renown I may have achieved," said Meredith.

"May I ask his name?"

"His name is Caleb Markham; unknown to you, of course?"

"I have never heard of him," answered his companion, thinking that it was a question put to her. "Is he well known in the literary world?"

"He is not known to the public, but his talents ought to have secured him a wide reputation. He is one more added to the number of unknown geniuses."

"How is that? Has he been unfortunate?" asked Beatrice.

"I am afraid *he* is more responsible for it than fortune. A natural indolence and indifference to renown has kept him from engaging in any work that would bring reputation as well as money. He is not fond enough of hard work."

"And his daughter, that pretty girl; is she literary too?"

"Not that I am aware of," answered Meredith. "She paints for her own amusement, combined with profit; and, I believe, has genuine talent for her art."

"I feel convinced she will not have to exercise it long. Such beauty as that cannot stand in lack of admirers. Do you not agree with me, Mr. Meredith?"

She was regarding him very curiously while she asked this question; perhaps she had her own ideas of the relations between him and his best friend's daughter.

If so, his perfectly self-possessed manner must have undeceived her, for he answered very gravely, "I sincerely hope it may be so, for her father suffers from

heart disease, which may take him from this world at any moment, and his death will leave her without any natural protector."

Mabel Markham had observed that beautiful stranger riding by the side of her friend with an interest that had something painful in it. She turned round quickly to her father with the question, "Do you know who that lady is?"

"Not I. I know very few of the 'swells' by sight," replied Caleb carelessly, "but I saw little Tommy Twyman here just now. He's an animated address book; he'll tell us in a moment." So saying, he sought the gentleman referred to, a frequenter of third-rate clubs, where he picked up an immense amount of scandal and gossip, and was soon able to satisfy Mabel's curiosity.

Markham was not an envious man by nature, and he would have been incapable of envying his old friend and *protégé*, Cyril Meredith, but he felt a little twinge

of self-reproach as he watched him riding past : he remembered that he had mis-used talents which might have put him in as good a position.

“ I have been a selfish, idle fellow, I begin to fear, my little Queen,” he said tenderly to his daughter as they left the park on their way back to Brixton. “ I have been content to live for the present, never reflecting that I might have made a brighter future for you. If I had worked as my friends used to exhort me to do when I was a score of years younger, you might have been riding to-day amongst the best of them.”

CHAPTER IX.

MABEL'S SECRET.

CYRIL MEREDITH received a letter from his aunt a few days before he started on his visit to Cheverton, informing him that she was now perfectly recovered from the effects of her illness, and requesting him to write to her from Devonshire, and give her some account of the people he met there. On the whole, there was more warmth in it than had been generally apparent in her other epistles.

He went over to Brixton to say good-bye to the Markhams, and found Caleb installed in the easy chair as a semi-invalid ; having just recovered from an attack of gout, which

had kept him a prisoner in the house for more than a week ; but his sufferings had not affected his good spirits in any marked degree.

"How is the favoured of Apollo?" he said gaily, as Meredith entered. "Our last meeting took place in the 'Row.' Have you abandoned the 'Nine' in order to worship at the shrine of Lady Beatrice Neville? If so, take care, for the Muses will surely revenge your infidelity by refusing you inspiration. I am afraid you go too much into society, Meredith."

"My dear friend, you must remember what an obscure life I have led for years," answered Cyril smiling. "Do not blame me if I bask a little longer than usual in the sunshine which I am now seeing for the first time."

"An obscure life," repeated Markham assuming a tragic tone ; "Ungrateful man ! Have you not enjoyed my constant companionship for those ten years which you deplore ? When you first made my ac-

quaintance your intellect was a diamond, it is true, but a diamond in the rough ; it was the constant contact with the hardness and brilliance of mine that polished it into the priceless gem it is now. But a truce with this jesting. You go down to Devonshire as the guest of that pillar of the state, Lord Ravensworth. Mabel and I intend to make a tour in Yorkshire as soon as I can leave this salubrious suburb. Mabel wishes to get to work on a landscape for which I hope to wring a hundred guineas from the same appreciative dealer who gave thirty for the other."

They talked together for some time, until Meredith found that his engagements would not permit him to stay any longer. "Where is Mabel? I must say good-bye to her," he asked, as he shook hands with his old friend.

"She is in the Tartarean regions, preparing dainties for me. Call out to her as you go down. Our solitary domestic has left the abode on household affairs."

But as he reached the hall, Mabel came out of the dining-room.

"You have called to see us before leaving town, I suppose?" she said.

"Yes, I am going down to Devonshire to-morrow."

"How happy you ought to feel to be able to visit at such nice places," she said with a little sigh; "I wish I were going."

"I wish you were," he answered kindly. That little sigh appealed to his sympathy.

"What a punishment it is to have aspirations which you feel can never be realized," continued Mabel; "some people seem perfectly contented with a commonplace life. I only know that I detest mine," she added petulantly.

"Well, if you persevere in your art, you may develope into a famous young lady," said Cyril encouragingly, "And then you will lead the life you desire."

"And break my heart in waiting till it comes. No, better to try and crush these vain longings at the beginning."

“My dear Mabel,” said Cyril, taking her hand and speaking in a grave, earnest voice, “if I do not seem to sympathise with you in this matter, it is not because I cannot understand what you feel, but because I would not wish to add to your discontent. For ten weary years—years that I look back to with a shudder, I had the same ambitions, the same longing for contact with refined and superior minds that you have now. I knew that my intellect was the only thing with which I could purchase my ransom from the life I disdained. For ten long years I worked and hoped in the very teeth of fate that seemed to mock my struggles. Day after day did I repeat to myself that the morrow must bear some fruit, and morrow after morrow came with the same bitter result until even hope could find no word with which to cheer the baffled aspirant. You know my life ; you know that there came at length a day when the seeds that I had planted gave forth fair and brilliant flowers. Take a

lesson from my history : *work and hope* ; plant the seeds in your youth as I planted mine : the flowers will bloom for you as they have bloomed for me."

Mabel's tears had welled forth long before he had finished his speech, but at its conclusion, she brushed them away hastily, and said in a faltering voice : " It is very kind of you to give me such encouragement. I should derive more comfort from it if I were certain that I had a tithe of your talents."

" You *have* talent, and study and work will perfect it," he answered with a cheerful smile. " The public is not so hard to please after all. It is merciless in its judgments on the spurious and the counterfeit, but ungrudging in its appreciation of the true. Strike the right chord, and applause will inevitably follow."

" Well, I will try to think so," said Mabel in a more cheerful manner. " After all, I am very young, only eighteen ; it is too early to despair, is it not ?"

"It would be too early to do that if you were ten years older."

"We will say no more on the subject; we have been sufficiently lugubrious already," continued Mabel. "I wish you a pleasant visit, but I am sure it will be nothing else. I discovered it was Lady Beatrice Neville with whom I saw you in the park the other day. She is very beautiful; are her manners a match to her beauty?"

"She is a most charming woman," answered Meredith warmly.

"I thought, perhaps, that she might be apt to patronize people belonging to a less exalted sphere than her own," said Mabel with a quick glance at him.

"Considering her position, she has the least pride of any woman I ever met."

"Is she clever as well as beautiful and fascinating?"

"Yes, she is certainly clever. She indulges in some literary aspirations which

she confesses she has not the ability to realize."

"She cannot have everything," said Mabel almost bitterly. "Beauty, and wealth, and high birth; surely fortune has been generous enough to her."

"I have told her the same, but she seems to think differently. Ah, my dear Mabel, she is like the rest of us; we all think what we have insufficient; our cup never seems full when we look at that of our neighbour. I must say good-bye now. Remember my counsel. *Work and hope.*" He shook hands with her, and moved by a kindly impulse, imprinted a kiss on her forehead. He had been accustomed to give her that caress for years, but had discontinued it since she had become a woman.

"Good-bye! I will remember it," she said, while a vivid blush overspread her fair face at that brotherly kiss. "And I will not be so morbid again."

But in spite of her promise, she went

into the dining-room after he had left to shed a few more tears. Her life was a dull one at the best, and it seemed duller than ever after he had gone, for Mabel Markham had an unhappy secret—she loved Cyril Meredith with all the strength of an enthusiastic and untutored nature, and she saw too plainly that her love would never win a return.

CHAPTER X.

CHEVERTON HALL.

THE journey to Cheverton, although a long one to those who have the misfortune to be indifferent to the beauties of nature, passed quickly to Meredith, who noted with admiring glances every charming variation in the features of the beautiful country through which he sped. Hill and valley, fertile plains and sloping uplands, sylvan glades where the timid deer disported themselves, succeeded each other swiftly. The sun was sinking slowly to the west when the train halted at the little station where passengers for Cheverton had to alight.

Meredith entered the carriage which had

been sent for him, and drove rapidly along the road which lay through country as charming and picturesque as any that he had admired on his journey. Each side of the road was fringed with a profusion of wild flowers and foliage, while the stately oaks and elms that formed the avenues of entrance to the old mansions, whose lodges stood close by the high road, lifted their tall branches skyward. Through the trees pleasant sweeps of pasture stretched into the uplands beyond ; the wooded hills stood out sharp and clear against the cloudless sky, while groups of browsing cattle moved slowly along the slopes. The golden hues of the sinking sun bathed the landscape in rosy splendour, and the soft shadows of the trees gave form and life to a scene of tranquil beauty.

The stoppage of the carriage and the appearance of the lodge-keeper told him that he was entering the gates of Cheverton Park. He passed quickly along a winding road, lined with trees and flowering shrubs,

and came to the great avenue of elms leading to the hall.

A large old house that had sheltered the ancestors of Lord Ravensworth for generations, had originally stood upon this site : it had possessed neither external beauty nor internal comfort, and when the uncle of the present owner had returned from foreign travel, he had resolved on its demolition. He determined that the new house should be no ordinary structure ; he was wealthy, and argued that he was turning his wealth to good account in giving employment to so many of his fellow creatures. He called to his aid the most skilful architect of his day, who caught the enthusiasm of the noble owner, and went to work with a right good will ; workmen from all countries, Italians, Belgians, Frenchmen, were engaged in the construction of the new mansion.

The house that rose on the ruins of the old one, was built on a rising ground near the centre of the Park, from which a magnificent view of the surrounding country was

obtained. Wood and water, hill and dale, were charmingly balanced in the general prospect; on a bare knoll in the distance stood an observatory replete with the science of the century, for Lord Ravensworth had a more than amateur's acquaintance with astronomy.

On the south were situated the flower-gardens, laid out by a master hand, where the choicest flowers, bordered by a background of the rarest plants, scented the air. A short avenue of beeches led to the lake, and on the rising ground beyond it stood a small Greek temple terminating the vista.

The house, which came into full view on emerging from the avenue, seemed to Meredith's critical eye, grand and imposing. Erected on a terrace behind which rose a dark background of luxuriant foliage it stood out in bold relief. The principal parts were happily grouped, and the wings and centre displayed that beauty of proportion without which the finest conceptions

are lost. Art and nature had here combined to form a picture such as the painter's fancy had seldom transferred to canvas.

The terrace, raised considerably above the level ground, was reached by a flight of steps. A parterre of many coloured flowers formed into curious geometrical figures filled up the centre ; front and flanks were walled in by a handsome balustrade, on the pedestals of which stood vases of antique mould, while nymphs and satyrs filled up the space between.

The building was a light gray colour, in harmony with the surrounding scenery ; classical in style, the principal façade was a marvel of artistic skill. A portico of lofty Corinthian columns formed the grand entrance. The fenestration was rich and varied, and the carved columns and statues gave character and unity to the structure.

Meredith's feeling was one of undisguised admiration as he gazed on the scene before him—the graceful columns, the beautiful acanthus of the capitals, the crowning

entablature with its carved modillions running from end to end binding all together in one homogeneous whole. As he gazed upon all this, his fancy was transported to those times which were unconsciously suggested—when the ancient Greeks, imbued with a grand spirit of beauty, produced the most splendid monuments of human genius, and made the city of Minerva the gem of the ancient world, and the marvel of the modern. He thought with a feeling of sadness of the great nations that had perished in the lapse of ages ; in his fervent fancy he saw the glittering waters of the Archipelago, the golden Cyclades, the rock and gulf of Salamis, and how the devastator in his lust of conquest, had destroyed the temples and profaned the sanctuaries of the Gods. “Can such a fate be in store for our own country?” was the involuntary reflection.

Such were the thoughts of Cyril Meredith, as he stood at the entrance of Cheverton Hall, and watched the sun sinking slowly to his bed in the western sky.

CHAPTER XI.

MET AGAIN.

THE guests assembled at Cheverton Hall comprised Edith Barrington and her mother, Geoffrey Elmore, Mr. Harwood, Mr. Morris, and many others, who, as they have no connection with the events narrated in these pages, need no description. All that need be said of them is that they were for the most part very pleasant people; for both Lady Beatrice and her father took care not to spoil a country party by the admixture of stiff or disagreeable persons. In any large assemblage domiciled for a length of time at one house, there is always a tendency to break up into small

cliques ; but Beatrice, who was an admirable hostess — possessing as she did to a rare extent those great qualifications for social success, well-bred tact and delicacy—repressed this tendency as much as possible, and by her good example, stimulated each guest to contribute to the general entertainment.

Her manner to Meredith was, if possible, more gracious than on the day of the garden party ; she welcomed him to her ancestral home in a few frank words that denoted a more than ordinary pleasure at his arrival ; and Cyril, as he replied in words equally courteous, felt that her beauty was likely to be more dangerous at Cheverton than in London.

“ In this place time will be to some extent our own, and I can listen without fear of interruption to instruction and even reproof of the kind with which you visited me at Twickenham,” she said with a charming smile.

“ I fear I must have been very rude and

abrupt on that occasion, since it lingers so in your memory. Perhaps I shall be able to make atonement in time. In fact, as I drove up the avenue, from which I caught the first glimpse of this beautiful house, my thoughts then were a kind of atonement, for I was thinking that even the possession of this splendid home, with all the social advantages that such ownership confers, would be but a poor set off after all against the disappointment of hopes that tended towards a loftier ambition than that of self aggrandisement."

"I am glad to hear you speak thus," she said warmly, "for I had hoped to find in you one superior to the motives which influence the lower order of aspirants for the prizes of the world. Even the world's praise should only sound sweet when it is bestowed upon those who have served it as a benefactor, not as a hireling who seeks his wages in applause."

"Perhaps you are too severe on us," he said smiling; "The motives that influence

men's conduct are always mixed. You know the cynical maxim the French philosopher, Rochefoucauld, has uttered on this subject. Still, I am willing to believe with you, that the grandest utterances of men have been inspired by their consciousness that they were the destined expounders of great and solemn truths. Truths such as these were uttered in the olden time by God-like men, who from stake and scaffold sent forth those burning words which find an imperishable echo, and lift the masses to higher regions of knowledge and freedom. Such men were imbued with the dignity of their mission ; speaking for all time, they cared not for the applause of the world."

Beatrice listened to him with marked interest, and when he had concluded, said—" We shall have greater opportunities for conversation when I become your guide to all the natural beauties of Cheverton."

" I am charmed with all that I have seen at present," answered Meredith.

In truth, there was much to admire in

this splendid mansion ; the interior vied with the exterior in perfection of taste and art. Passing through the vestibule from the portico, you entered the great hall, the walls of which were lined with ancient trophies : spur and gauntlet, sword and rapier, crossbow and shield, musket and arquebuss, were grouped in quaint and curious devices, suggesting those lawless times when pillage and murder were rife, when crime was purged by wager of battle, when might was right, and the strong man chief, and deeds of most appalling guilt were perpetrated in the open day by his armed vassals.

The reception rooms were grouped on the left wing, on the right were the picture and sculpture galleries, library, billiard-room, and theatre. The dining and drawing-rooms were striking pictures of elegance and comfort ; architectural decoration, aided by the sister arts of painting and sculpture, combined to perfect the conceptions of the artist. Curtains of the richest hue draped

the windows of the spacious saloon ; luxurious couches, inlaid tables, rare cabinets, full of the treasures of art, lamps and silver sconces ranged round the room, elegant girandoles, and silvered mirrors reflecting all in their polished faces, gave evidence of refined and discriminating taste.

On the walls of the grand staircase were frescoes exquisitely coloured, the figures standing out full and life-like, the flesh warm and glowing as the soft tints of a southern sunset. Divided into panels, the subjects were such as had been treated by the Greek painters when their art was at its zenith. Penelope awaiting the return of Ulysses, weaving her never-ending web of hope ; Diana in huntress dress, pursuing the deer over the mountains, while in the distance stood the great temple of Ephesus, one of the wonders of the ancient world ; the destruction of the rash Phaeton ; the sacrifice of Iphigenia, treated with wonderful power, the pathos in the averted figure of Agamemnon, who has covered his face with his

mantle to conceal his agony, being subtly expressed.

Among the more striking frescoes were : The banquet of the Gods ; the Olympian deities assembled together with Jupiter, the supreme disposer of events enthroned at their head ; Apollo slaying the Python, where the god, laurel-crowned, majestic in stature, perfect in manly beauty, was represented standing in the depths of some Thessalian thicket, and aiming his deadly shafts at the wounded monster ; Hercules receiving the presents of the Gods ; the bow of Apollo, the breastplate of Vulcan, the horses of Neptune, the robe of Minerva. Between the frescoed panels were canopied niches, in which were sculptured figures holding branch lights in their hands.

In the picture gallery rare pieces of sculpture, modelled from the works of the great masters of antiquity, were placed on pedestals between the groups of pictures ; the Niobe of Scopas, the Apollo of Praxiteles, the Laocoon, the great work of the

Rhodian artists; Cupid and Psyche, Minerva and Mars. Amongst the paintings were fine examples of the different schools, Italian, French, Flemish, and Dutch; nor was our own country neglected in the collection, some fine specimens of the English masters, with some of the best productions of modern art, worthily representing native talent.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MISTRESS OF CHEVERTON.

“TAKE care that she does not prove too beautiful for your peace!” These warning words uttered by Ruth Meredith recurred often to her nephew, during the early days of his visit at Cheverton. Seeing Lady Beatrice constantly amongst the crowded saloons of London, and only snatching that hurried conversation which is alone possible where there are so many to be spoken to, he had formed the conclusion that she was a woman of superior mind. Of her beauty there could be but one opinion. He had never asked his own heart whether she was one likely to excite a warmer feeling

than that of admiration ; the social difference between them seemed too great for love ever to reconcile.

But at Cheverton he was thrown constantly into her society ; he found himself frequently her sole companion in those rambles through the vast park in which she took such delight, and he was enabled to fathom all the depth and richness of her highly-stored mind. The full extent of a man's talent is best displayed in the book to which he commits his most sacred thoughts, for which he could find no oral audience ; and a woman, in like manner, reveals her true nature, not in a mixed or large society, but to one or two with whom she can talk in comparative privacy.

They were seated alone in the park one afternoon, and she had requested him to read to her from his own poems.

" I can read other people's poems better than my own," he said, with a smile, " but if it affords you gratification, I am only too

pleased ;" and in a rich, flexible voice, he read the following :—

“TOO LATE!

“ Friends, and fortune, and fame, and praise !

I only know they have come too late,
We sought them long in those weary days
And they stayed so long she could not wait ;
Listening for what she never heard,
Looking for what she might not see :
Weary, perhaps, with hope deferred,
Though never a whisper of this to me.

“ I can gather the roses now as I please,
Where together we plucked but thorns instead,
But the only use that I make of these,
Is to lay them where my heart lies dead,—
Down on the grave where my lost love lies,
Weary of waiting, with hoping done :
Passing away ere her aching eyes,
Could catch a glimpse of the rising sun.

“ Fortune has opened her niggard hand,
Too late ! for *she* is not here to share :
And Fame has told my name to the land,
Too late ! its voice cannot reach her there ;
And friends crowd round, whom my heart would
prize
Dearly enough, were *she* here to see,
And thank with the glance of eloquent eyes,
For the loyal love they bear to me.

"All has come that we hoped and dreamed,
 Strove for, and prayed for, and wept to miss,
In the days when love like a glory streamed,
 And I drew her soul to mine in a kiss :
Has come, and how can I make her know
 That my delight in it all is fled ?
Will she hear me, if I whisper it low
 By the grave where my heart and she lie dead ?"

"Thank you," said Beatrice courteously, when he had finished. "You make the gentleman in that poem very constant. That is romance of course. In real life, he would have discovered, in a very short time, some lady who could console him for the past."

"How unjust you are to our sex," replied Cyril with a smile. "Do you think that constancy is the sole prerogative of the ladies ?"

"I fear so," said his companion with an arch shake of her head. "Men are fervent at the beginning, but the flame waxes fainter and fainter towards the end."

"You think then that men cannot love as deeply as women ?"

“For the time, often more deeply,” replied her ladyship. “But I fancy that love, in its most exalted sense, is only known to us. You can love passionately, it is true, but your love is selfish : you can make some sacrifices, but you demand greater sacrifices in return : you exact fidelity in thought and deed, but how seldom do you proffer it in exchange! And therefore I say that the love which gives all, but exacts little, that can pardon until seventy times seven, that is steady, pure and unwavering, is the love of woman.”

“You draw a very flattering picture of your own sex, I must say,” said Meredith, laughing. “Well then, you are to be envied, for having the faculty of loving in such profusion. Will that view of it satisfy you?”

“Is the capacity to love such a blessing? some say otherwise.”

“Heartless cynics, who because they possess no feeling themselves, seek to exalt its absence into a virtue,” replied Mere-

dith warmly. "Such men are happy in one respect—they are indifferent to sorrow, but then they are equally incapable of understanding the meaning of happiness. Five minutes life of one whose nature is tuned to respond like a fine instrument to the touch of emotion, is worth a hundred years of such an existence as these soulless cynics drag on."

"I agree with you there, without reserve," said Beatrice, with a soft, dreamy expression in her beautiful eyes. "Sensitive natures are the victims of painful as well as the recipients of joyful emotion, but who would not risk the one for the sake of the other? I think I would sooner love, even were it to my own unhappiness," she added in a low tone, "than leave life with my heart frozen in an eternal sleep."

They were silent for a space, and then Meredith said, with a smile, "But love is the modern fair one's jest. Plutus, not Cupid, holds the golden key that unlocks the hearts of our modern *belles*."

"Cynic!" exclaimed Beatrice, in affected indignation.

"I have provoked your anger. I will say no more on the subject," he replied gaily; "here, at least, where nature smiles so generously on us, we should not entertain such base thoughts of the world. A man ought not to be cynical in the presence of such beauty. Truly, Cheverton is a glorious place."

"It is at Cheverton that I feel I am of some importance to my kind. In London society I know I am such a small unit in the grand total of human existence. But here, I feel I have an empire. I can visit the sick, relieve the poor, condole with the afflicted, and do something to lessen the misery which I see around me."

"And that is a sufficiently noble mission," said Meredith.

"Ah, you are thinking now of my literary dreams which I was foolish enough to confess to you. Well, I cherish them still a little, you must know. I would prefer that

my empire should be over the mind, not the body."

"Say rather over the heart. Your sovereignty here is over the hearts of the people you benefit. Where is there a nobler dwelling-place than in the hearts of mankind?"

"Ah! you are attempting to convict me once more of ingratitude," said Beatrice, smiling gaily; "But see, the sun has travelled a long distance while we have been conversing. Let us go back to the house. I have indulged in sentiment with you: I must correct it with a little cynicism from Mr. Harwood."

"Nay, I have been cynical to-day too," said Meredith, as they rose to go home-wards.

Lord Warton was amongst the guests at Cheverton. His invitation had been one of long standing, and to have excused himself from his visit now, would have been to excite suspicion, and perhaps bring about the discovery of his refusal by Beatrice.

That refusal had not at all daunted him; he was still convinced that commonsense would in time come to her aid, and compel her to perceive the manifold advantages of such a match. He felt it was impossible to find a woman more fitted to become his wife, and, moreover, he loved her with as much enthusiasm as his cold nature was capable of.

Between him and Meredith there had arisen, from the first moment of their meeting, a mutual antipathy, for which neither, if he had been questioned, could have assigned any satisfactory cause. It happened, also, that they regarded nearly every public question from a different point of view, and thus, in the many arguments that were sure to arise in an assemblage of men, they were often antagonists. As Beatrice and her companion were walking back to the house, they met Lord Warton and Lord Ravensworth. From their quick gestures, it was evident they were holding an animated discussion, and as they ap-

proached them, Lord Warton was saying, in that clear cold voice which was typical of the nature of the man,—

“Do what you like to assist them, my dear Lord Ravensworth, the poor are always ungrateful. Cease your favours, and from that moment they abuse you.”

“Permit me to correct that statement with my practical experience,” said Lady Beatrice. “I am constantly amongst the poor, and I meet with the greatest gratitude.”

“My dear Lady Beatrice, it is with great reluctance that I cannot be converted by so charming a disputant,” said Warton, with a gallant bow ; “but my experience, I am sorry to say, has made me arrive at a different conclusion.”

“Well, for my part, I do not see that the poor have much for which they can be grateful,” said Meredith, joining in the conversation. “Their life is dull enough.”

“If that argument be valid, no man could be contented so long as his neigh-

bour had something which he did not possess," answered Lord Warton with a slight sneer.

"You are reasoning rather illogically;" said Meredith calmly. "There could not be that difference between you and Lord Ravensworth that there is between yourself and a labourer."

"I presume you hold Radical opinions," replied Warton coldly. "You would like to see an equal distribution of property, perhaps? That is a very convenient doctrine."

"I should wish to see nothing of the kind," said Meredith, sternly. "I only plead for a little forbearance from the successful ones of the world to those who have been so unfortunate as not to possess their opportunities of self-advancement."

"I quite agree with you, my dear Meredith," exclaimed Lord Ravensworth in a hearty tone. "The rich have great responsibilities; I, for one, endeavour to prove myself cognizant of them. The poor are

committed to our care and protection. My friend Warton stands on a pedestal of theories which is so high that he cannot always see clearly the plain facts which are passing in the valley beneath him."

It was in this manner that the antipathy between the two men had developed into an intellectual and social rivalry. The greatest dislike was on Warton's side ; for, like most men who are proud and cold at the same time, he was excessively sensitive with regard to the position which he held in the estimation of his friends, and anything approaching to a defeat in argument, he felt as a deep personal humiliation. It was death to him to have to descend for a single instant from that intellectual pedestal on which the fanaticism of some of his admirers and his own vanity had conspired to place him.

But, in spite of these occasional clouds upon the horizon of harmony, the visit to Cheverton was a delightful one to Meredith. There were two other persons, also, who

discovered in it a good opportunity for renewing their old friendship, and these were Edith Barrington and Geoffrey Elmore. Mr. Harwood had opened the campaign most skilfully for his young friend. He had attached himself exclusively to Lady Barrington, with a devotion that afforded unfeigned satisfaction to the lady. In his conversation with Geoffrey he had spoken of her disparagingly as an old woman; but the real fact was that her ladyship had only just turned forty, an age at which no tolerably good-looking woman need despair of a second husband. Whether matrimonial thoughts were busy in her brain, it would be an impertinence to inquire. This much was certain, that she received Mr. Harwood's attentions with marked politeness.

"Vanity, my dear boy, is one of the weakest points of the fair sex," he said to his friend when they were discussing the future. "Pamper that, and they are, metaphorically speaking, at your feet. It is an atrocious sentiment, I confess. My

only consolation in such duplicity is the reflection that I am working for a good end, to serve the happiness of two young people. And, old cynic as I am, I still take pleasure in a good action."

"Your assistance is most valuable to me," returned Geoffrey, gratefully.

"Well, to be candid, I believe you could not manage without it. My devotion to the mother engrosses all her thoughts upon herself, and turns them for the moment from Edith. But how are you getting on with that young lady? Do you find her too much imbued with the spirit of her mother's philosophy to look upon fifteen hundred a year with any favour; or is she sufficiently independent to think for herself?"

"The latter, I fancy," answered Geoffrey, laughing—adding, "I think I am progressing as favourably in her good graces as I have a right to expect in so short a time."

In spite, however, of his cheerful assurance to his friend, Geoffrey was not quite

so certain of success as he appeared. Talbot Champion was amongst the guests, and contrived to engross Edith's company more than was pleasant to a lover not quite sure of the regard in which he is held by the lady he covets. Whenever he adverted to the subject, Edith always protested that she entertained the greatest aversion to his society, and that she only tolerated it in obedience to her mother's commands. But this explanation was, of course, not always so satisfactory as she intended it to be. Mr. Champion had good looks, plenty of small talk, and five thousand a year. As Harwood, in a spleenful mood, had remarked to Geoffrey, "it was three and a fraction to one against him."


CHAPTER XIII.

BONDAGE.

At length Cyril Meredith knew the full meaning of love. Fortune had showered many gifts upon him, but had delayed the bringing of this, the richest : love, that he had sung of often, long before he could comprehend by experience what he pictured in such glowing words. He knew now that this singing had been the prophet's inspiration, the roseate vision of the promised land which none save he could see.

Day after day did his admiration for this beautiful woman develope into a passionate adoration which he felt himself powerless

to check ; day after day, as he drank in the musical tones of her voice, as he gained a deeper insight into her noble and generous nature, did he own to himself that he had at last discovered his soul's ideal. Truly, it was a scene for love in those glorious Devonshire woods, where their souls first began to bridge that gulf which social circumstances had dug between them. All nature seemed to take part in that serene rapture : the full-throated singing of the birds who warbled in the shadows of the trees that waved around them seemed to breathe a music of the heart. For, in the early dawn of passion, all objects seem to reveal a meaning unto love, eager to discover symbols of the joy in his own breast : in the birds' singing, in the full life of the flowers, in the silver flowing of the river, like the progress of a tranquil spirit to its final rest. All the old life seemed prosaic in comparison with the sublimity of the new, for love breathed a fresh existence amid that smiling nature.



Morning after morning did they wander alone amid those beautiful scenes, gradually drawing tighter and tighter the links of that golden chain which was binding heart to heart : pausing in the woods, where the trees' wide wealth of foliage scarcely let a sunbeam fall, to listen to the birds' exultant strains, or by the narrow pathway watching the river's tranquil flow. And Cyril, dwelling upon the beauty around him with enamoured glances, listened to her voice's music as they passed along : for she had a poet's subtle fancies, which would have charmed the world to listen had she married them to verse.

"It is folly, this love of mine for one who is as far above me as are the stars," he had reasoned bitterly with himself ; "but it is a folly so delicious that I cannot resolve to put wisdom in its place. To have tasted of the delights of Paradise, even if exile were destined to follow, is better than never to have stood within its golden gates. Let me love, although I cannot crown my

love with hope. At least, I can be permitted to enshrine till death her image in the sacred temple of my heart."

Happily, or unhappily, as the future could alone determine, there were no obstacles to their intimacy: on the contrary, fate seemed to have gone out of the way to throw them together. One day he had been translating to her from the "Antigone." In spite of the difficulties attending a *viva voce* translation, he had been enabled to give her some insight into the poetry and passion with which the speeches abound, and at its conclusion she had thanked him warmly, and Meredith had said—

"But translation is a poor substitute for the original. You get the idea, but the beauties of style, the justness of epithets—in a word, all the graces of poetry that illustrate the thought, as the sunlight reveals the lustre of a precious stone—escape in another language."

"I should like to read it in the original.

But Greek is *the* most difficult language of all, is it not?" asked Beatrice, musingly.

"Well, I must confess there is much to learn in it," replied Meredith. "The sight of a Greek grammar would certainly inspire you with awe. The declension of the nouns and adjectives, and the conjugation of the verbs are something stupendous."

"I have an ambition to learn Greek," she said, after a pause. "Would it be troubling you too much to give me some lessons? I will try and prove an intelligent pupil."

"I shall only be too happy," was Meredith's answer. "When shall we begin?"

"To-morrow morning, by all means. We must lose no time."

So they began their lesson the next day, and Beatrice soon made remarkable progress, committing the declensions to memory with as much ease as if they had been specimens of the finest poetry. Her determination soon became known to all the visitors, and there was much laughing

and joking her about it at first; but when they found that she received their badinage with her usual serenity, and that she was not to be moved from her purpose by ridicule, they let the subject die a natural death. Lady Barrington, however, considered it highly improper that Cyril Meredith should be her tutor, and she communicated this opinion to Mr. Harwood at the first opportunity.

"Lord Ravensworth is one of the best-natured men I know," she observed to him; "but he is singularly deficient in wordliness. It is most imprudent to allow Beatrice and this young Meredith to be so much together. She is highly romantic, and he is just the man to take her fancy. Oh, Lord Ravensworth is very blind not to see it as we do!"

"Remember, my dear madam, that it is few who can lay claims to your penetration," said Harwood, with a hypocritical bow. "If all mothers and fathers resembled you

in your vigilance, the rising generation would all be cast in one exemplary mould."

"And yet I have sometimes heard you advocate an opposite theory to that which I recommend," said her ladyship. "I think you would allow too much freedom to young people."

"My dear Lady Barrington," said Mr. Harwood, solemnly, and giving that prefatory cough which signified an impending oration, "when I reflect upon the briefness of our earthly sojourn, the fleeting nature of all human happiness, the innumerable trials and vexations that are thrust upon us by fate, the greater troubles that we bring upon ourselves through our own indiscretions, I must emphatically declare that it is little short of presumption in any human being to claim the right of directing another person's happiness, when he is powerless to insure his own."

At the conclusion of this speech, he looked at her ladyship triumphantly, for

he had no mean opinion of his oratorical gifts.

"Very specious philosophy," said Lady Barrington, shaking her head gently. "Surely it is the duty of wisdom to instruct ignorance and inexperience."

"Madam," replied Harwood, sternly, "the wisest man amongst us is he who is most conscious of his own ignorance. 'Know thyself,' was the motto which the Greek sage had inscribed in letters of gold in the temple. There is true philosophy in that maxim."

"Possibly," replied Lady Barrington. "But I think I have read that the Greeks were very severe to their children; that their training and education were of the strictest description."

"You are thinking of the Spartans, a martial, heroic, but not refined kind of people. They were great brutes in domestic matters. But the more refined States, such as Athens, paid great respect to women.

The accomplished Aspasia divided homage with Pericles."

"Ah, I am not well-informed upon these matters," said her ladyship, who stood in dread of Harwood's classical proclivities. "But we have wandered very far from our subject. From Lady Beatrice to Aspasia is a long step. I still consider it highly imprudent of him to permit this intimacy; he is teaching her Greek now. What in the name of common sense does a girl want Greek for?"

"I don't know that it will help her to a husband the sooner, certainly," said Harwood, dryly.

"These clever, blue-stocking women are not popular, as a rule, you know," answered Lady Barrington; adding, with a fascinating smile, "Your sex prefer in us the gentler qualities, that make women so lovable, and render the domestic hearth a place of peace, not of argument."

"There is much knowledge of human nature conveyed in that remark," said Mr.

Harwood, in an appreciative tone ; he was disposed, for the moment, to take a more favourable view of her ladyship's mental endowments than he had previously believed possible. "A man meets with sufficient opposition from the outside world ; he does not wish to come home in order to be contradicted at his own fireside."

By such timely and judicious compliments as these did Mr. Harwood preserve his influence over the widow, and distract her thoughts from his young friend Geoffrey.

Lady Beatrice did not forget her duties to her guests in her desire for fresh knowledge ; she was always proposing some new amusement, and planning excursions to the different places of interest in the neighbourhood. "We must make up a party to go over to Meldon Castle," she suggested one morning at breakfast. "It will be a glorious day for the excursion, and many will see it for the first time."

The party was soon made up ; some rode, the others preferred driving. Amongst

the riding party were Beatrice, Cyril Meredith, Edith, Talbot Champion, Mr. Harwood, and two other visitors. Geoffrey Elmore had made up his mind to join them at first, but when he found that Talbot Champion had anticipated him, he gave up the idea in high dudgeon, and decided to drive a very stout dowager in a phaeton.

"It is useless my joining you with that fellow—he will engross her as he always does," he said angrily to Harwood, as that gentleman was preparing to mount his steed with his usual deliberation. "He's beginning his infernal chatter already."

"Let him," replied Harwood gruffly. "I always like to hear a fool chatter. I know then that disgust will only be a matter of time with his listener."

In spite of his anger, Geoffrey could not help smiling at his friend's uncomplimentary reference to Mr. Champion's gifts of conversation. "All I know is, that if your theory be correct, he ought to have disgusted her long ago," he said.

“ There are state reasons for her toleration of him, my dear boy,” replied Harwood, kindly. “ Lady Barrington rules supreme at the Home Office, and her policy must be carried out in the eyes of the public. Don’t be so nervous of that young puppy. I will prevent him from being too tender to Edith during our ride.” And with that assurance he trotted after the rest, who were getting out of sight.

They rode on through miles of glorious wood-crowned, undulating country ; the tender green of the slopes and hills and meadows relieved here and there by the appearance of some primitive hamlet : and Cyril Meredith, with all a true poet’s sensitiveness to the beauties of nature, felt that, with Beatrice by his side, he was in some fairy world, after which the hot saloons and monotonous terraces of London seemed like a prison.

CHAPTER XIV.

* AMONG THE RUINS.

"FROM the anarchy of the feudal ages to the peaceful beauty of Cheverton, what a gulf of crime and blood has been bridged over!" exclaimed Meredith, as Lady Beatrice and he stood on a broken wall of the ruined castle.

"And yet the contemplation of the past saddens the heart, when you remember the ambitious hopes that have been crushed, the ties of blood and kindred and affection that have been rent, often savagely, asunder in this vast interval," replied Beatrice.

"How paltry seems the ruin of such structures as these to the overwhelming

destruction of the ancient world ! So many powerful empires overthrown, so many opulent cities, splendid palaces, and sacred temples destroyed, while the earth trembled beneath the conflicts of armed men. When we read the annals of these mighty nations, our own land seems a creation of yesterday !”

“ But that which grieves me the most is the knowledge that, in spite of our boasted civilization, most of the problems of human existence are still unsolved,” said Beatrice warmly. “ Oh that the great of the earth would think more of their lowly brethren ! The amount of moral evil in the world appals me. What a weight of human misery is endured by those below us !”

“ You speak truly. The strong man still oppresses the weak ; there are tyrants even in our days who have usurped their power ; ministers who are rapacious, chiefs who are unscrupulous, and judges who are unjust. Still the world progresses. The fruit is *slow* in ripening, but it *does* ripen. In the

moral and material world changes are slow; to the men of every epoch almost imperceptible. Still, when you measure back the centuries you see the *distance* you have travelled.

“Life is a mystery,” rejoined Beatrice, thoughtfully. “It is girt round with a complex combination of events; and in it wisdom and folly jostle each other in endless succession. But I own with you there are glimpses of a brighter future, full of promise and hope to man. The dark night of the feudal ages has passed away for ever; in fancy alone can we reconstruct the past. In fancy we imagine the mailed chief and his armed retainers keeping their nightly wassail; see the cattle driven by crouching peasants passing over the drawbridge; and remember that the clang of the portcullis must have sounded like a death-knell to the ear of many a captive maiden.”

“The age of feudalism was an age of license and rapine; where corruption and depravity nestled under the pomp of mili-

tary splendour ; where the vizor of the soldier concealed the mask of the voluptuary, and honour and fealty were names used to sanctify the purpose of iniquity. Near this moated castle, gallant knights and their trusty squires have met at tilt and tournament on the field, slippery with the blood of slain and wounded men; from the balcony, overlooking the lists, ladies of high degree, arrayed in gorgeous apparel, have smiled upon the victor, as he knelt to receive his chaplet of honour from the Queen of Beauty."

"Ah ! rich armour, gay apparel, noble steeds—the splendid magnificence of the few weighed against the eternal degradation of the many," replied Beatrice in a voice of great emotion. "One shudders at the thought of the lives of the *people*—in ruined hovels, with clay floors strewn with rushes ; on straw pallets with a log for their pillow, they passed a life of vicissitude, destitution, and misery."

"And the more you examine the past,

the more contented will you be with the present," said Meredith. "Looking back through the past of history, new modes of thought and forms of life meet you at every stage. Then, as now, in their midst, were the Heralds of the *Future*, undermining the fabric of the *Present*, and pointing with no unerring finger to the destined track of humanity."

Beatrice did not reply, and moving from the broken wall on which their conversation had been held, they resumed their inspection. In another part of the ruins was a group of which Mr. Harwood was the centre.

"What a charming place! I adore ruins, don't you, Mr. Harwood?" asked Miss Singleton, a gushing young lady of twenty-seven or thereabouts.

"My dear young lady," replied that cynical gentleman, "when you address a man of my sober time of life, do not make use of such exaggerated expressions. A man who is close upon sixty adores

nothing. With regard to your question—of all the lugubrious spectacles upon this lugubrious planet, I consider that ruins take the palm — always excepting a marriage or a funeral.”

“What morbid ideas you have, Mr. Harwood. What makes you so cynical and melancholy?” said Miss Singleton, not at all daunted by this rebuff.

“There are many causes to account for it,” he replied dryly ; adding, “one of the chief amongst them being the contemplation of some people’s cheerfulness.”

“How oddly you talk ! I cannot profess to understand you.”

“I should not consider it a great compliment if you did,” muttered the old gentleman to himself — then aloud : “Possibly not, my dear Miss Singleton. I, you see, am an old man, who has enjoyed a long experience in extracting from life the bitters and sweets of which it is compounded. I may have been more unfortunate than many engaged in the same operation, for I



have got a larger proportion of bitters. You are, at present, a neophyte in this practical kind of chemistry, and you naturally find everything delightful, even ruins."

"Oh, Mr. Harwood, do not envelop the buoyancy of youth in your cynical wet blanket! Life is sweet, else why are we so loath to leave it?" The voice was that of Lady Barrington, who had approached in time to overhear the last part of their conversation. Harwood groaned inwardly at the well-known sound: his fidelity to his young friend Geoffrey had been sorely tried during his visit.

"Permit me to remind you that you are trespassing upon ground which has been occupied—pardon my seeming lack of gallantry—by greater philosophers than you," he said testily. "If you wish to have your question succinctly answered, let me refer you to that famous soliloquy in Hamlet—'to be or not to be.'"

"My woman's heart gives me the best answer," replied her ladyship, loftily. "Be-

cause the most discontented amongst us have something to live for—husband, children, friends. My days of enjoyment are past; the flowers of my youth will never put forth another blossom, but I live for my child, my darling Edith.” This sentence was spoken in a most pathetic tone.

“And your darling Edith lives, that is to say, very soon will live,” said Harwood, hastily correcting himself, “for somebody else; that exacting, inconstant creature they call a lover.”

“But she will never forget the mother whose only thought has been for her welfare. A mother will always be a mother, Mr. Harwood.”

“What a senseless remark,” groaned Harwood to himself; adding testily, “she cannot certainly be transformed into anything else.”

“Ah!” said her ladyship with a plaintive sigh, “you do not fully understand these holy feelings, these profound emotions—as a poet beautifully expresses it.

‘The sweet, sweet love of mother, of sister, and of wife.’ If you would but allow one of our sex to convert you to my way of thinking, convert you practically, I mean,” she added with a fascinating smile.

“Thank you very much, madam,” exclaimed Harwood hastily, and drawing a step farther back from her vicinity. “I have no ambition to be converted. I prefer to remain a heathen, matrimonially speaking.”

At this juncture, Meredith, accompanied by Lady Beatrice, joined them. To him Lady Barrington turned as to one on whose sympathy she could rely.

“I have been endeavouring to convert Mr. Harwood to more genial views of mankind, and, I may add, womankind also. You will, I am sure, appreciate my efforts,” she said, with a marked politeness in her manner, for she always paid respect to those whom the world respected.

“Most heartily,” replied Meredith. “Mr. Harwood, I am convinced, could not long

maintain his ground against so charming a disputant."

"I fear you are a flatterer," replied her ladyship, fluttering her fan. "But where can Edith be?" she said, with a sudden sharpness in her manner.

"Looking at another portion of the ruins, probably," interposed Harwood.

"And Mr. Elmore, too?" she continued, with increasing vigilance.

"I saw him just now with Lord Ravensworth," replied Harwood, with splendid hypocrisy.

"My dear girl will be here presently, no doubt. Ah, Lady Beatrice," she added, turning to that lady, "a mother's life is one continual anxiety for a beloved object."

Mr. Harwood groaned inwardly once more at that statement. "Sentiment finds its refuge on the tongue when it has fled from the heart," he muttered to himself, in parody of Voltaire's famous remark on shame.

Lady Beatrice only smiled courteously in

answer to her friend's somewhat plaintive statement, and hastened to change the conversation. "Mr. Meredith and I have been looking at the remains of the dungeon where the page was imprisoned for presuming to love the daughter of the proud owner of the castle. She procured access to him in disguise, you know, and released him from his bonds."

"I read the story the other day, and was deeply affected by it," replied her ladyship. "Ah, Mr. Harwood," she added, turning to that gentleman, who was endeavouring, out of loyalty to Geoffrey, to conceal to the best of his power, the reluctance with which he tolerated her society, "I fear you do not comprehend the depth of woman's nature. When we love devotedly, we are no longer weak women, we acquire the souls of heroes. As Moore says, very beautifully—

'For love is heaven, and heaven is love.'

"Scott, madam, Scott. Tom Moore

never wrote a line like that," said Mr. Harwood; adding to himself, "this woman's affected sentiment positively renders the air unwholesome. I wish Geoffrey would bring matters to a point, and relieve me from my command: the service is growing excessively irksome."

"The least the lady could do for her faithful lover was to take some little trouble in trying to release him," said Meredith, presently.

"Does the history go on to relate whether the young man proved himself worthy of the trouble she took, or leave that part of it to the imagination of the reader?" inquired Mr. Harwood, with a grim smile.

"I will not listen to such a doubt," said Lady Beatrice.

"Ah, but a dungeon must be a terrible corrective to enthusiasm," continued Harwood, with provoking calmness. "Even your indomitable devotion would require something stronger than bread and water to nourish itself upon, Lady Barrington."

"Martyrdom is sweet, if incurred for those we love," was her ladyship's ready rejoinder.

It was impossible for him to disturb the current of her facile eloquence. A slight interruption was caused by the entrance of Lord Ravensworth.

"Well, Mr. Meredith, I hope you have been gratified by these interesting views. They are considered one of the sights of our neighbourhood. You know the romantic story about the page, of course. Do you intend to make a poem of it?"

"Not at present," was Meredith's answer.

"Don't write any more love poems; it puts rebellious notions into the heads of silly young women," said Harwood; "and too many of them are silly enough already," he added, in a tone inaudible to the company.

"I quite agree with you. I believe the French system of marriage is as productive of conjugal happiness as the English, and

they do not marry there for love we know. Love matches do not always end in happiness."

The speaker was Miss Singleton, of whom some ill-natured people were heard to assert that she would enter marriage upon any conditions.

"At the worst they only end where the marriages of convenience begin," said Lady Beatrice, warmly. "It is better to enter upon life with a full purse than an empty one. At the end of ten years they may be in the same bankrupt condition; but in the one case you have, at least, experienced the gratification of spending money."

"True love is as rare as true friendship," said Meredith gravely. "Is there one man in a thousand who ever meets with a woman like the one he has pictured for his wife? Shadowy and unsubstantial phantoms he may discover often enough, but not the breathing, palpable form of his soul's ideal. A perfect companion is he who is one in thought and heart and feeling with yourself.

When you meet with such a man, you recognise in him a friend ; when you meet with such a woman you acknowledge in her one who is worthy to be adored until death."

Such an opportunity for the indulgence of sentiment was not likely to escape the vigilance of Lady Barrington. "Would that every one could find such a soul-companion," she exclaimed pathetically. "Life would no longer prove the dull and prosaic existence that it is to many, but glide gently and softly, like—like—some beautiful dream from which we would not wake."

"It is not the difficulty of meeting with them so much as the difficulty of persuading our fathers and mothers to see with our eyes when we have met with them," said Harwood, with a keen glance at her ladyship.

"Your speech is a libel upon us," she answered plaintively.

"You must not heed what Mr. Harwood


says," interposed Lady Beatrice; "I never do, I know him too well. He has the tongue of a cynic and the heart of a philanthropist."

"He reminds me of those beautiful lines of Pope," said her ladyship, who was quite willing to accept the view of Mr. Harwood's eccentricity :

" 'Let humble Allen with an awkward shame,
Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.' "

During this conversation, Edith and Geoffrey, in a lonely part of the ruins, had arrived at that important understanding which Mr. Harwood desired. When Edith saw that they were separated from the rest of the company, she grew a little nervous and said quickly, "Mamma will miss us, had we not better return?"

"Let mamma miss us," replied Geoffrey, with supreme calmness. "I have been waiting some time for this opportunity, and now that it has come so unexpectedly, let us wisely take advantage of it."



"What do you mean?" asked Edith, turning slightly pale.

"It means that I want to know my fate at once, Edith," he answered in a voice that was kind and grave. "The other day when I put some very searching questions to you, you gave me a few answers which made me fancy that I need not despair. I want to know now whether I was right or wrong to indulge in that hope. I want you to tell me whether you care enough for me to become my wife?"

Edith's eyes were fixed on the ground during this speech, and her fair cheeks turned from pale to red, and red to pale, with wonderful swiftness, but she made no answer.

"Many persons would think it presumption in so poor a man as I to ask a girl who could get offers far more brilliant," he continued. "But riches, as I told you once before, Edith, do not always mean happiness. I cannot give you them, but I can give you a true heart. Is that too poor a gift?"

"I would not desire a better one," answered Edith in a low tone.

"Is that an answer, dear?" he said tenderly, taking her hand.

She looked up at him with a shy smile, as she replied, "Yes, if you choose to take it."

Geoffrey's answer was to raise the little hand to his lips. "My darling," he said, "you have made me so happy."

"I can never tell mamma," said Edith, with a little shudder.

"Well, we will not take her into the secret as yet, at all events," answered Geoffrey. "And now, my darling, we will go and join different detachments, and arrive separately in the presence of her ladyship."

Geoffrey was the last to join the main party, looking as *nonchalant* as he could. In a few moments Harwood took him aside, and said in a tone of great pathos:

"Geoffrey, my dear boy, I implore you to dispatch your love-business as quickly as

possible. You have been quite long enough here to have made an agreeable impression, and if the young lady intends to have you, she will have you now. The task of diverting Lady Barrington's attention is one that strains my faculties of endurance too much. The implacability of Juno could not have assigned a harder thirteenth labour to Hercules."

"I have done what you wished," replied Geoffrey. "Edith has consented to be mine. Let me thank you for the service which you have rendered me."

"And let me congratulate you on your good fortune," said Harwood kindly.

CHAPTER XV.

MARKHAM'S HISTORY.

THE next day Cyril Meredith rode by himself to a small village called Marling, about six miles from Cheverton Hall. It was a relief to him to be sure that he was alone with his own thoughts; they were now beginning to be absorbed by only one object.

“Is it foolish or not to ask myself if she cares for me?” he thought, half aloud, as he rode among the perfect silence of the lanes. “Her eyes have fallen beneath my gaze, and her voice has faltered in answer to some questions that were a sufficient revelation of the story that I shall never

have courage to tell her. What are those signs worth? I am a fool to feed my hopes on such unsubstantial food ; to take a mere passing emotion for the presence of a reciprocal tenderness. She *likes* me—that word like, how cold and freezing it seems !—because she finds in my mind one congenial to her own ; because I understand what the gay worldlings with whom she lives style her eccentricities. That is far too slight a bond to unite the heart of Lady Beatrice Neville, the peerless belle, the heiress, the descendant of illustrious ancestors, to that of Cyril Meredith—a man whose origin is little less obscure than a peasant's. A wise man would tell me to fly from her fascinations—I am too weak to follow that good advice. I must linger by the spot where my heart is—until she gives it me back—and that can never be. I have lived all these years without love—to love at last in vain !”

“What ho ! there—music-maker ! singer of dreams ! That mortal-looking quad-

ruped is not Pegasus. Bring your 'poet's eye in its fine frenzy rolling' from heaven to earth, and condescend to recognise your old friends."

Such a whimsical salutation could only proceed from Caleb Markham, who was standing on the pathway with his daughter.

"What brings you into this quarter?" said Meredith, as he dismounted from his horse, and advanced to shake hands with them. "I thought you were in Yorkshire."

"The world is a small place—a man soon discovers that when he wishes to avoid his creditors," replied Markham sententiously. "We have finished our Yorkshire trip, and we have come to vegetate here for a week. This is the land of my birth, although you may not be aware of the important fact."

"I certainly was not, I only knew you were born in some part of Devonshire."

"About an eighth of a mile from this spot stands the humble edifice which will *not* be exhibited to future generations as the birth-

place of Caleb Markham," replied that whimsical man. "A churlish stranger sits in the halls amongst which my careless childhood strayed, not quite a stranger to pain, however, for I preserve a lively recollection of sundry castigations administered by my father, who was a kindly but withal severe man. This surly successor to our home, a creature with a countenance as devoid of meaning as that of one of his own pigs—in fact, a mere animated clodhopper—refused me admittance instead of falling prostrate at the mention of my name. Such is renown, my dear Meredith. If the great Cæsar could knock at the door of this ignorant caitiff, what a small man he would find himself."

"I am sorry you could not gain admittance," said Meredith.

"So am I," replied Markham, "but give us your company as far as the inn at which we are staying : an old-fashioned, but comfortable place with a garrulous old landlady, whose memory jogs along com-

fortably by the side of mine. I always think of old Shenstone's lines when I am travelling.

“Whoe'er has travelled life's dull round,
Where'er his wanderings may have been,
Must sigh to think he still has found
His warmest welcome at an inn.”

Meredith threw his horse's bridle over his arm and walked with them.

“Old memories come back to you quickly when you visit the scenes of your childhood,” said Markham, pensively. “How well I remember playing in the fields with my sisters, Ruth and Alice? scenes not so bright as those that came after. You have never heard my history in its entirety, Meredith; it is rather an eventful one. If it is not boring you, I will relate it. You may weave it into a story some day.”

“I should be exceedingly interested,” replied Meredith, kindly.

“My sisters were considerably older than I, and both remarkably handsome girls, not a bit like your humble servant as you may guess. My father cared very little for me,

but he worshipped his daughters. Neither had any difficulty in procuring admirers ; rustic suitors came by the dozen ; but my sisters despised their awkward method of making love. My father was rather gratified than not at their constant rejection of these village Lubins, for in his own mind, he considered them a match for the sons of noblemen. Well, there came a time when Alice began to indulge in very long walks ; sometimes she went alone, sometimes accompanied by Ruth. You can, of course, guess the end of this. How well I can recollect the night when my father tottered into the room where Ruth and I were seated, with an open letter in his hand and his face white with passion. 'She has deceived me, the girl on whose purity I would have staked my life ; she has left her father's roof to fly to shame.' He had scarcely uttered those words when he fell on the floor in a fit. He was ill for a long time after that, and although he implored Ruth, whom he declared to be in the secret, to tell

him what had become of his darling Alice, she would never breathe a syllable, always protesting, of course, that she was as ignorant of her flight as he."

"And did you never hear of your sister after she left?" asked Cyril curiously.

"Never," replied Markham, "but the most extraordinary part of the narrative is to come. After Alice's flight, Ruth used to take long walks generally twice a week. I have afterwards guessed that she went to receive letters from her sister. Well, a year had elapsed when one night Ruth disappeared, leaving behind her even a briefer letter than the other, telling her father that she hoped she would return soon, but that if her absence continued, he must forgive and forget her."

"What an extraordinary *dénouement*!" exclaimed Meredith.

"I thought you would exhibit surprise; you seldom hear of a double romance in one family," replied Markham. "Well, to continue; after the flight of his second

daughter, my father's temper, which had never been of the best, became permanently soured, and I fancy that his former indifference to me developed into positive dislike. It is possible that he was disgusted at my remaining faithful to him while the others had gone, when, from the three, I was the one that he could have spared with the least compunction. I hated the farm and farm work, and having picked up a considerable smattering of literature in my leisure hours, I nursed the ambition of becoming a man of letters. So, one day, I informed my father that I intended to try a new kind of life, and departed with his blessing and a hundred pounds in my pocket. I knew the son of the editor of one of the county papers, who was doing very well in London, and through him I procured my introduction to the select band of *literati*."

"And what became of your father after you left? Did he live long?"

"No, a very short time. I used to visit him

occasionally, although my filial respect did not seem to afford him much gratification," said Markham. "He died three years after, leaving what little he had to me. The farm was let, and from the day that I left Marling when I had settled all the affairs, to this, I have never set foot in the place. But see, we are arrived at the hostelry. Let us enter."

So they went upstairs to the neat little sitting-room which Markham and his daughter had occupied during their visit to Marling, and conversed together for more than an hour: Caleb's vivacious sallies upon every subject making the time pass very swiftly.

"Is it of any use asking you to come and dine with us to-morrow? I will cross-examine Mrs. Clegg upon the resources of her larder with the keenness of an Old Bailey barrister if you will so far honour us," said Markham, as he rose to go.

"My dear old friend, you must be sure that there is no one whose invitation I

would accept more readily than yours," answered Meredith, shaking him warmly by the hand. "I will ride over to you to-morrow with the greatest pleasure."


"And in addition to the banquet that the foresight of Mrs. Clegg may provide for us, we shall have 'the feast of reason and the flow of soul.' There is a piano in the room, as you perceive, to which my little queen can warble some of her songs. Adieu, my dear boy. Tell Lord Ravensworth that he must display more caution in the coming session, or I shall be compelled to give him another leader like the last, in which I so fully exposed the folly of his arguments. Truly, this is a democratic age," added Caleb in a tone of reflection. "Fancy such a poor devil as I am, the son of a not particularly flourishing farmer, venturing to instruct a high and mighty peer like him in the columns of a 'daily.' Don't lose your heart to the fair Beatrice. Mabel tells me she has an ambition to become the tenth muse."

A slight flush rose to Cyril's cheek at the mention of that name. Her memory was so sacred to him that it seemed as if even that light banter profaned it.

Mabel followed him from the room, and when they were out of hearing, she said in an anxious voice, "Oh, Cyril, I have suffered such anxiety about papa lately! His health seems to be very bad. He has had two seizures that I cannot understand since we left town. Without a moment's warning he falls to the ground; he does not lose his senses, but is, for the moment, perfectly incapable of motion. He tells me that the doctor says it is the result of general debility."

"It is nothing more, you may depend, my dear Mabel," said Meredith, in a soothing voice, intended to allay the girl's suspicions. "You must remember that your father has worked very hard in his time, and this is the result."

"What should I do if he were to leave me?" she asked, wringing her hands.



"We must not think of such a thing yet," replied Meredith gravely. "But if I am alive when it does happen, you will always have a brother in me."

"Your time is much too valuable to be wasted on an obscure girl," she said with a sudden bitterness. "Lady Beatrice and such high-born women as she will engross it too much."

"My dear Mabel," said Meredith, surprised at this sudden bitterness, "surely that speech is not very complimentary?"

"Is it not?" she answered with a forced smile. "Well then, I will apologize for it to-morrow. *Au revoir*," and with a wave of the hand she left him.

CHAPTER XVI.


RIVALRY.

"I MUST ask your forgiveness for my desertion of you this evening," said Meredith to Lady Beatrice on the following morning. "I discovered yesterday that my friend Markham was staying at Marling, and I promised to ride over there and dine with him."

"Is he alone, or is his daughter with him?" asked Beatrice.

"He takes his 'little Queen,' as he calls her, with him to every place."

"Such beauty as hers is sufficient excuse for your absence," she said with a rather mocking smile.



His brow grew overcast at that mocking tone. "That is not the manner of a woman who has any deeper feeling than friendship," he thought bitterly to himself, and he answered her almost coldly, as he said in a measured voice,

"I fear you attribute too great an influence to beauty. Venus had her temples in the olden days, but there were many other deities to whom men paid their worship."

"Ah, but you forget the convenience of the Pagan religion," replied Beatrice with the same satirical smile. Perhaps she had discovered with a woman's keenness that her bantering tone had nettled Cyril, and with a woman's love of teasing, resolved to ruffle him more. "A man could worship as many deities as he pleased. You are a poet, I know, and consequently a disciple of Apollo, but that does not prevent you from kneeling at the shrine of Venus occasionally."

"But you are so vague in your arguments; you speak as if man only worshipped

beauty, as if he must become a slave to every beautiful woman he sees."

"Well, it is so very often. Paris was the slave of CEnone, until he saw Helen. If he had seen a lovelier woman still, he would have forsaken Helen."

"You are taking the picture of a sensual, cowardly Greek, who was too great a poltroon to fight the man he had wronged, for the portrait of a true man," said Cyril warmly. "There are plenty of Parises I dare say in modern society, but they are not to be taken as society's representatives. If beauty alone were to be worshipped, there would be no such thing as love."

"And does true love dwell in the hearts of your sex?" asked Beatrice.

"In the hearts of many of them, not of all, of course."

"Ah, I think Miss Singleton was right the other day when she said that love-matches very seldom ended in happiness," she said, with the same provoking calmness.

"Why, you argued with her yourself

then ; contending that they only began where the other marriages left off : that it was better to begin life with a full purse than an empty one."

" I know I did, but I have been reflecting on the subject since."

" Then for what would you marry, if not for love ?" asked Cyril, scornfully.

" I would marry a man of sterling character, whom I respected."

" Respect is a very cold feeling," said Meredith, in a grave voice.

" Ah, but, Mr. Meredith, you know as well as I, that not one love out of a thousand withstands the wearing influence of time," replied Beatrice, earnestly. " The summer of youth soon flies, and then the winter of life comes on apace, and the suns seem dimmer and colder than those which warmed the heart, and made fair the face where they only discover wrinkles now. Idle to expect that love will be love complete through the years : rather will it change with the years, until the heart scarce

misses the warmth of heart, scarce cares to trace the progress of this mutual coldness, and our lives would drift utterly apart, were they not just held together by the link of a common name."

"Where have you acquired these morbid ideas of love?" asked Meredith.

But Beatrice continued, without pausing to answer his question, "With a ghostlike memory breaking in occasionally upon our dull repose, and quickening the pulse for a moment, at a tone, or a touch, or a look, like those that thrilled so in the olden days."

"You certainly draw a most melancholy picture," interrupted Cyril.

"That word love means something more to us than to you," she continued, not heeding the interruption. "Where do men woo us? amid the glitter and glare of fashionable life, where they never catch a glimpse of our souls; where, because we are fair and vivacious and light-hearted, they come to think we may deserve the name of wife.

Then comes the reaction, they discover that there is no affinity between our natures ; that name of wife has sobered all romance, love is grown too familiar to be always welcome, and the old siren voices which they obeyed before they listened to that of love, lure them to a divided life."

"Upon my word, you are complimentary to us."

"With an easy smile, you'll find excuse for the treason done to your early vows," said Beatrice, smiling at her listener's indignant interruption ; "and you will reason in the following fashion—'I can take what I please from the fair things that are left here for me to choose from ; the world allows a man to improve his taste, forsooth ; and if, in my ignorance, I mistook a wandering star for a settled light, I have my remedy, and need not gaze too much upon that which offends me by recalling too vividly the blindness of heedless youth.' What then ? Will man's Heaven be dark for a star the less ? let him shift his place ;

there are stars enough to right and left ; light in profusion for the phantom light that mocked him so."

"And what remedy is there left for women who discover the blindness of their youth ?"

"Very little," she replied, almost sadly. "Our weak vision cannot range far beyond the present light ; if that one star should pale or disappear, it leaves us in darkness. We risk our all, men risk a part. They give us what a man can spare ; *we* give them all our life and soul. We fear, but yet we do not pause ; doubt is not master over love, and we dare to risk it all because love whispers to us which to choose."

"And this is the end of all that elaborate reasoning," cried Cyril, smiling. "You make out that there is no lasting love in the world : that every man makes promises only in order to break them, and then at the conclusion, you act exactly like a person who held a totally different philosophy. Lady Beatrice, you are strangely inconsistent."

"I am a woman," she replied, with a charming smile; "that is sufficient excuse for my inconsistency. But, after all, it is only in my practice, not in my reasoning, that I fail. It is in the heart, not in the head, that we are weaker than you."

And as Cyril rode over to Marling that evening, he thought to himself, "Surely, Beatrice is the strangest mixture of the enthusiastic girl and the practical woman."

They often had dancing at Cheverton of an evening. There were many young people amongst the visitors, and to them it was as pleasant a method of killing time as could be devised. Meredith entered the ball-room the night after the one on which he had dined with Caleb Markham, and saw, what was a very unusual sight, Lady Beatrice sitting almost alone.

"Are you engaged for this dance?" he said, advancing towards her.

There was a slight expression of annoyance on her brow as she replied, "I promised this dance to Lord Warton, but as

he is five minutes beyond his time, I think I may consider myself at liberty to accept another partner," and she rose and took his arm. As they were preparing to join the dancers, Warton came up to her hastily. In spite of his usual self-control, an angry flush rose to his brow at the sight of Meredith, and he said almost rudely,

"I believe you were engaged to me for this dance, Lady Beatrice?"

"I *was* engaged to you, Lord Warton," she answered haughtily, "but as you seemed somewhat neglectful in claiming the promise, I did not feel it incumbent on me to wait your pleasure. Unpunctuality must pay its usual penalty," she added, in a lighter tone.

"I must accept my punishment, which, I need scarcely assure you, is a heavy one," he replied, concealing his chagrin with as good a grace as he could muster. Common sense told him that any display of annoyance would only give a triumph to the man he detested. So Cyril and Beatrice had this dance together, and at its conclusion, he led

her into one of the ante-rooms, the windows of which opened on to a terrace. It was a beautiful night ; there was no moon, but the stars shone like jewels in the cloudless sky.

"This is the time for a walk, if people had a taste for nature ?" she said.

"Let us walk up and down the terrace, I will get you a shawl," he said. She consented, and he fetched a shawl and wrapped it carefully round her, and they promenaded the terrace.

"Do you know Percy Carrick ?" she asked him in the course of their conversation.

"I have never met him, although I have heard enough of him. You must remember that I have not been in society very long. I shall know every celebrity in time."

"He is coming here to-morrow," said Beatrice ; "We have known each other since we were boy and girl ; my father was his guardian ; his parents died while he was still a child."

“He is reputed to be excessively clever,” said Meredith.

“He deserves his reputation,” answered Beatrice slowly. “He is young, but he has read everything, and can converse on every topic;” then she added, after a pause: “He is generally popular. There is no one in this house with whom you could converse on more equal terms than with Percy Carrick, but I am not sure that you will like him.”

“Time will show,” he answered pleasantly as they re-entered the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

PERCY CARRICK.

LONG before he arrived at manhood, Percy Carrick had made up his mind that two thousand a year and the title of plain country gentleman would not content his ambition ; and with a person of his resolute character, to determine was to perform. He had made the most of his opportunities both at school and college, for he knew the superiority which accurate knowledge gives to a man of talents over his less well-informed contemporaries. He saw that there were two paths leading to fame that were both open to a man of tolerable income : one the literary, the other the political. He rejected

the former as one pleasant enough to wander in occasionally, but demanding more ability than he possessed to enable the traveller to reach the goal. In politics, he argued, a man can get to the front rank with much less talent. But as he wished to achieve something that would give him a little reputation to start with, he wrote a novel, well knowing that a man of independent means who has written a successful book, enjoys some consideration amongst his friends. His work of fiction was remarkably successful for a first work, and as he read the favourable notices upon it, Percy Carrick felt that he had laid the first brick in his temple of fame.

Literature, however, was but the stepping-stone ; at the first opportunity he offered himself for election in his own county, and was returned by a strong majority over his opponent. Once in St. Stephen's he felt that he had his future clear before him. Little by little he had won his way quietly but surely, until persons had become to

consider him of some importance, and had spoken of him encouragingly as a "rising" man.

Percy Carrick, however, possessed much worldly knowledge, and he saw that although it is possible for a strong man to climb the ladder of fame without assistance, his ascent is very much facilitated by a pair of helping hands ; he felt that to make his career more certain, he must attach himself to some powerful friend. In mentally running over the list of his acquaintances who could serve him, he decided that Lord Warton was the most fitted for the post. He foresaw that Warton's own abilities, joined to the great influence exercised by his numerous connections, would soon lift him into a sphere where he could easily take such a friend with him. To Lord Warton, therefore, Percy Carrick attached himself, and attached himself with the success that had attended his former efforts.

The next item in the programme of his ambition was a brilliant marriage. In en-

deavouring to secure this, however, he found greater difficulty than he had anticipated. He did not wish to marry any wealthy woman of obscure or common antecedents ; it was an equal chance that such an alliance might retard his progress. Young ladies eager to endow a talented young man with their fortunes on the chance that he might at some future day, repay their generosity in social distinction, were rare. Being brought up on such intimate terms with Lady Beatrice, he had guessed readily that in her he should find a woman who would listen alone to the dictates of her own heart ; but, with his usual penetration, he soon discovered that he was the last man in the world to possess the key to open it. Percy Carrick was not a bad-natured man ; his first consideration was, of course, his own aggrandizement, and he would have sacrificed anybody's interests in that one supreme cause ; but he had no ill-feeling against Beatrice for her inability to help him in his worldly progress, and per-

ceiving that he could not win her for himself, he would have had no objection to see her the wife of his friend Lord Warton.

For proud and reticent as Warton was, Percy had contrived to become the sharer of all his secrets ; and amongst them had been his determination to woo Beatrice. Having once communicated this resolve to him, it had been almost impossible to hide from him the story of his rejection at Twickenham. Even to his bosom friend that confession was a desperate humiliation, although he was certain that his secret was safe in such keeping ; for it was one of Percy's publicly-expressed maxims to hear everything and tell nothing. He had, in a word, gained that ascendancy over Warton, that a versatile brilliant mind not unfrequently holds over a sluggish, cautious nature.

In person, he was slightly above the middle height and well formed ; with no pretensions to good looks, he had the face of a clever man, and the keen grey eyes that

told of the possession of more than average intellect. In society, he won golden opinions; he could talk to anybody and on anything, from a diplomatist grown old in statecraft to the most frivolous girl just arrived from the school-room, and both would have expressed in different terms their admiration of him. He had, moreover, a wonderful and subtle knowledge of human nature.

"Meredith and the fair Beatrice seem to be remarkably great friends," he said to Warton, as they were strolling together in the afternoon, a few days after his arrival.

"Do you suspect anything, from your observations?" asked Warton.

"It is too early to suspect," replied Carrick, laughing good-humouredly. "I shall be able to give you a definite opinion in a week's time, perhaps. I can only repeat now what I have told you before, that Beatrice is totally unlike other women, and that the reasons which would guide the conduct of other women, would never influence her own."

"Still, think of the distance between them," exclaimed Warton angrily.

"To a woman of her temperament, that consideration would only lend an additional romance," said Carrick, with a shrug of the shoulders; then he added more seriously, "If she loved this Meredith, my dear Warton, I have not the least doubt she would marry him. But at present we have no proof that she does love him, and we had better wait until we have determined that question before we speculate on the future."

"But her father would never give his consent," urged Warton.

"Lord Ravensworth is a well-meaning, pompous old gentleman who would storm and bluster for the first ten minutes, declare that he would never hear of it, and in three days be melted by his daughter's tears," replied Carrick with great calmness.

Percy Carrick would have done all in his power to secure Lady Beatrice for his friend: for he was not troubled with any

of those sensitive feelings which would have stood in the way of his giving such a proof of friendship. But it may be doubted whether Warton's palpable annoyance at the notion of a rival did not afford some amusement to a man of his cynical temperament. For he could afford to laugh at the weaknesses of others, since he shared them to so small an extent in his own person.

"How do you like him?" said Beatrice to Meredith a few days after his arrival.

"His intellect is of the first order : his manners are agreeable to a fault."

"I know all his qualifications, but that is not answering my question," answered Beatrice quickly.

Meredith smiled at her impatience. "Since you press me so hard then, I must tell the truth, and throw myself upon your mercy, if I offend you with my inability to like your old friend. His mind is a brilliant storehouse of thought. But his heart is cold : he lacks fine sympathies."

"He is very worldly, I must confess," said Beatrice thoughtfully.

"There is a want of heartiness, of enthusiasm about all he says and does," continued Meredith. "In all his philosophy there is that under-current of reference to worldly success and worldly approbation. He gives me the idea of a man who believes in nothing but himself: a man who would be guided in his course by no high principles or ennobling thoughts, but by the mere impulse of self-aggrandizement. But I fear that I have offended you by my frankness."

"Not at all," she said with a gracious smile. "I wished to know your real opinion of Percy Carrick. I cannot agree with you in all you say of him. I think he has more heart than you give him credit for. Perhaps, however, my opinion is not worth very much: having known him from childhood, I am naturally disposed to take an interest in him, and think well of him."

The next day she put a similar question

to Carrick. Long before Percy came, she had indulged in much speculation as to the possibility of there being friendship between the two.

"Oh, he is a very agreeable fellow," answered Carrick. It was one of his maxims never to speak ill of anybody to another person, especially if that other person were a woman. "He dwells a good bit in the clouds I fancy. But I suppose they are a poet's legitimate home."

"It is refreshing to meet with an original mind, is it not?"

"Very," answered Percy dryly; adding, "I fancy success has made him proud."

"I think you are mistaken there," exclaimed Beatrice eagerly. "People often think I am proud, I know; and yet there could not possibly be a more humble-minded person," she added smiling.

"I daresay you are right," said Percy indifferently. "But you know, my dear Beatrice, I have not very much sympathy with poets or poetry. I never was what

you call a romantic person. I never had the poetical fever in my youth ; never stayed up at night to write watery sonnets to the moon, or despairing odes to an imaginary Chloe."

"No, you were too practical," said Beatrice sarcastically."

"Far too practical, as you observe. I chose a career in which success means power ; in which your triumph is visible in the applause which greets your efforts ; the deference with which men listen to your lightest word. Rhyming is very well in its way, but give me the control of a nation's destiny in preference to an empire over the hearts of a few love-sick girls."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A GOOD UNDERSTANDING.

"I AM afraid there is no alternative, my dear Edith. We must elope," said Geoffrey Elmore, with the calmness of a man who had fully made up his mind. He made this announcement in one of the many discussions concerning their future, that had arisen since that day amongst the ruins, when Edith had revealed her love for her old playmate.

"That is a very daring resolve," answered Edith, turning a little pale.

"You need not look so white over it, my darling. As long as we are to be married, the means are of secondary importance," said Geoffrey, in a kind tone.

"Pray pardon my trepidation," answered Edith, with some traces of her old vivacity. "It is due to the novelty of the suggestion. I shall become used to it in time, no doubt. But you see, we girls are not so audacious as your sex. Besides, it is a terrible contemplation—no wedding cake, no bridesmaids, no mother to cry over you. It is certainly not the way in which a Barrington should be married."

"If you speak of that, my dearest Edith," returned her lover, in the same tone, "it is not the way in which an Elmore should be married. Our family have always been remarkable for the magnificence with which they have celebrated their alliances."

"What does it matter to you?" asked Edith, poutingly; "nobody cries over the bridegroom."

"True," replied Geoffrey, calmly, adding with a smile, "a great mistake, though, for very often he deserves to be commiserated the most. Besides, do not forget, Edith, that true happiness does not consist in

munching wedding cake, and giving expensive lockets to ungrateful bridesmaids. And remember also that the sum which would have been expended on these costly trinkets, can purchase you a very handsome gift."

"That is certainly a recommendation," said Edith, cheerfully. "I must confess I am no great admirer of the indiscriminate generosity which prevails at weddings."

"With regard to your mother's tears, they will certainly be much more sincere in our case, than if they had been shed over your marriage with a man that she had chosen for you herself. You can see that, I am sure."

"Yes, it is very true," replied Edith, with a smile; then she said in a serious voice, "But, Geoffrey, will you promise to love me as dearly then as you do now?" never to play the tyrannical or jealous husband; always let me have my own way; think everything I do perfect, and everything I say wise; in a word, treat me as if I were

a perfect paragon? Will you vow all this to me?"

"I vow it most solemnly, and thus do I ratify my vow," replied Geoffrey, lifting her hand to his lips.

"I don't think much of promises ratified in that fashion; a man will promise anything for the mere pleasure of ratification," said Edith, blushing and smiling.

"Can you doubt me, Edith?" asked her lover, reproachfully. "Have I not loved you all my life, from the days when we were boy and girl together? Don't you remember our being married, with my brother at the tender age of ten, officiating as priest? Surely, Edith, you cannot have forgotten that?"

"I have a faint recollection of the ceremony," answered the young lady.

"I don't think you were quite so reluctant then as you are now."

"Ah, my dear Geoffrey, you must remember that at that time I did not command such a high premium in the matri-

monial market. At that tender age I have not the least doubt that I was grateful for any husband."

"Rather complimentary to your youthful bridegroom, I must confess. But to return to our former subject, I am afraid there is nothing for it but to elope. You confess that there is no hope of ever softening your mother?"

"I am sure there is none," said Edith, with a very rueful expression.

"Then in that case, if we are to marry at all, we *must* elope. After all, it will not be such a formidable affair. We shall start by an early train, and get to London, and be married almost before your mother has missed us. When she finds we have taken our destiny into our own hands, she will relent in time. But I declare you are turning pale again at the mere suggestion."

"How barbarous you are, Geoffrey. I believe you would like me to be as brazen as you over it!" cried Edith, half indignantly.

If poor Geoffrey had spoken the truth, he would have been compelled to confess that his own courage was, to a great extent, assumed. To take a girl away in direct opposition to her parent's inclinations is a bold experiment. He did not give Edith a hint of this, of course; for he had a shrewd suspicion that besides discouraging her, such a confession would have the effect of lowering his claims to her respect.

"I am so terribly frightened of mamma," continued Edith, after a pause. "You do not know how keen and suspicious she is. When we got into the railway carriage, I should be afraid we might find her ensconced there already."

"I possess a key, and my first proceeding would be to lock us all in together," said Geoffrey, calmly. "I should then inform her that if she opposed our plans, we would have her arrested at the first station at which we arrived as an escaped lunatic."

"Oh, Geoffrey dear, would it not be better

to wait a little, after all ; to tell the truth to mamma, and see what effect time will have in softening her prejudices ?” asked Edith, on whose rueful countenance her lover’s sallies had not raised a smile.

“ My dear Edith,” replied Geoffrey, in a very grave tone, “ forgive me for saying that this trifling is out of place. You have surely had sufficient time in which to foresee all the consequences that may result from the step we are about to take. Still, if you feel your courage fail you at the last moment, I will release you from your promise. I love you, Edith, dearly as a man can love, but I will not be base enough to purchase my happiness at the expense of your own. It is not too late to draw back. Express the wish, and you are free ; and I will never trouble you with my suit or presence again.”

“ I do not wish to draw back,” replied Edith, quickly, rather alarmed at her lover’s stern manner ; adding with a half-nervous gaiety, “ Am I to have had all the

trouble of making up my mind, of braving mamma's anger for nothing? We will elope most certainly. Oh, Geoffrey, dear," she said, with a charming blush, and a penitent folding of the hands, "I know I have tried your patience very sadly, but you must attribute it to a foolish girl's love of coquetry; to that silly pride we take in straining a man's love to the utmost, in order to see how much it can bear, Why should I not confess it? I love you just as dearly as you do me, and I was sure of this just now when you spoke of releasing me from my promise."

"Now, indeed, you are my own dear darling little Edith," cried Geoffrey, enraptured; "like the dear little girl who used to cry so disconsolately when I left for school, and give me so many kisses when I came back."

It was fortunate that they had arrived at this desirable point of understanding, for at that moment two figures were seen advancing through the trees, and in another

instant, Mr. Harwood's voice, loud in argument, smote the air.

"Sir, I tell you the youth of the present day are not to be compared to the youth of my generation ; they have not the manliness, nor the ease, nor the ——."

"Of course, I never had the pleasure of acquaintance with the youth of your generation. I can only form an approximate idea of them from the old gentlemen who are left to us." His opponent was Mr. Talbot Champion.

"Then, sir, if you know nothing about them, it is argumentative impertinence for you to dispute the truth of my assertion," cried Mr. Harwood hotly.

"It is always impertinence to argue with Mr. Harwood," replied Champion, with a sneer.

"No, sir, it is not ; you mistake my character, sir," said his opponent, growing very red in the face. "I like an argument, and I respect my antagonist, sir, so long as his method is sound, and he keeps his

temper ; a thing, sir, which you young men of the present day lose too often. In my time, when an insulting word meant a meeting the next morning, men had to keep a guard on their tongues, I can tell you,"

" You must have fought a goodly number of duels under those conditions," said Champion, in the same provoking tone.

" I *have* fought, sir, and I would be ready to fight again, if the cowardly custom of this country had not taken a man's honour from his own guardianship to deliver it into the hands of a pack of noodles, called jury-men," cried Mr. Harwood fiercely.

They had come face to face with Edith and Geoffrey at this point of their altercation.

" Your poor father would have corroborated me, had he been alive," said Mr. Harwood, turning to Geoffrey as to an unexpected ally. " Ah, sir, the world was worth living in when he and I were young men. The present age is inferior in every respect ; it hasn't a tithe of the genius or

the capacity that used to distinguish the Senate, the bar, and the stage."

"You are prejudiced in favour of the old times," protested Edith.

"Not at all. I am a singularly unprejudiced man," persisted Harwood, to the ill-concealed amusement of Talbot Champion. "But the facts are too patent. Where are your actors? the drama expired with the retirement of Macready. What of your present singers? fine voices amongst them, I grant, but no artists equal to those I remember. Now, it is *vox et præterea nihil*."

"Well, it is impossible to argue with you, as we did not live in those times," sneered Champion.

"You young men of the present day are a lackadaisical, effeminate race," replied Harwood, with a vicious emphasis on the *you*, as if he were showing his contempt for his opponent directly. "You don't even know how to make love. You talk to a young girl as if you were honouring her by

your notice. In my day, sir, there was chivalry in our manner to the fair sex. When we were in love, we were not ashamed to confess it to the object."

"I have no doubt that the most accomplished man of the present day couldn't produce a list of conquests equal to Mr. Harwood's," said Champion coolly.

"You may sneer, sir; it don't affect me, the wit of the present generation is very harmless," he replied, with a withering smile. "You may think yourselves, young puppies that you are very superior to your fathers; but let me tell you that I'd give a dozen of you for a man of the old school," and with this parting shot, Mr. Harwood pursued his way.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PHILOSOPHER.

AT that moment, Cyril Meredith was pacing his chamber with folded arms and knitted brow: a prey to the most bitter thoughts. He was realizing the full extent of his slavery.

"This is no ordinary love, no mere boyish enthusiasm for a beautiful face," he said to himself. "Such a love would work its own cure. In the strong, keen light that the future would throw upon the perished years, I should see the specks and stains upon the idol that I imagined spotless. But this is a man's intense, mature love. Attracted at first by her marvellous

beauty, it was not that which drew me onward and onward until I lay fettered : it was the soul behind that perfect face which had breathed into it a more than common loveliness. There are beautiful women on whom nature has lavished all her grace, and yet left them soulless, as imperfect as a scentless flower or a songless bird. From such I could have taken no hurt. Women who know not the meaning of love ; who stand cold and shivering in the presence of the glowing sun whose heat causes others to faint and swoon ; whose rays can never turn to fervour the chill morning of their life. Oh, Beatrice, why were you not like these ? Why have I lived to become an idle dreamer, sailing against the stream of fate ?”

He took her portrait from a drawer and kissed it passionately ere he resumed his bitter reflections.

“ Of all madness love is the worst. Of all the cruel deities, love is the most pitiless. Oh, had I worshipped other idols

in a temple that could endure, not a fairy fabric planted with a face to every wind ! I have chosen the worst, and I reap the fruit of my folly."

He put the portrait back into the drawer, and went slowly down the great staircase, through the great hall until he reached the terrace. At the end of it, he saw Lady Beatrice standing alone : he advanced towards her with a heart that was half sad, half joyful.

"Lady Beatrice alone ! where are the bees ?" he asked in a surprised tone.

"Mr. Meredith, you are a persistent flatterer," she answered, affecting indignation. "You poets are always paying so many compliments to your imaginary mistresses that you cannot condescend to employ common prose in your conversation. I am not the heroine of a poem in six cantos, so please do not attribute to me all the virtues under the sun."

"Flatterers have an object. What object can *I* have in flattering *you* ?" said Mere-

dith in a half-cynical tone. "I, who have no more motive in fawning than had poor Horatio?"

"You seem in one of your discontented moods to-day?"

"Do I? Then I am very ungrateful, for I have never been happier in my life than here."

"Well, there have been some very pleasant people here, certainly," she said.

"Are you not responsible to some extent for the happiness of my visit?" he asked in a low tone.

A vivid blush overspread her cheek, as she answered in a tone of forced gaiety, "You would now make me more conceited than ever. How can I answer that question without seeming vain?"

"Let me answer in the affirmative for you," he said tenderly.

There was silence between them for a moment. Her blushing cheek and down-cast eyes revealed her knowledge of the feelings betrayed by these words and tones.

A sudden impulse impelled Cyril to speak, to tell her all, to prove whether there might not yet be a chance of this supreme happiness. But he checked it instantly. "Why ask, only to be told that I must cherish no hope? I know she would say it kindly, but honeyed words could not soften the sting of rejection," he said to himself. Beatrice was the first to break the silence.

"I for one shall be sorry when the time comes to return to town."

"And I too; for then I shall see so little of you."

"We can be friends in London as well as in the country," she said quickly.

"There will be too many there who have prior claims upon your attention."

"Now, you are talking nonsense, Mr. Meredith," she answered, with a smile that was intended to compensate for the rudeness of that speech. "Must I tell you what I have told you so often, that it will give my father and myself the greatest pleasure

to find you a constant visitor at our house? I begin to think you are very rude to doubt my assurance."

"But you must be civil to people who have greater claims to civility than I."

"What a delight you seem to take in depreciating yourself."

"Not at all. I am not so elated by my recent successes as not to be fully conscious of my social disqualifications. If I were a man of good family, you would not have to find fault with me on the score of vanity, I can assure you."

"I suppose you are very vexed that you cannot place a strawberry leaf in your poetical chaplet; it would improve its appearance wonderfully, no doubt," she said, scornfully.

"Oh, my ambition does not extend so far. A plain country gentleman's rank would have suited me."

"Well, then, I must regret, for your sake, fate did not make you the son of a country gentleman. It only gave you a

supreme genius. I should envy a country gentleman's lot, if I were in your position," she answered, in the same scornful tone.

"Would you have changed your destiny, willingly, for that of a great authoress?"

"Unhesitatingly," she replied, eagerly. "Is there a comparison between the two destinies? Here, I am Lady Beatrice Neville: known well enough as long as I mix in the world of fashion, and forgotten a year after I die, even by the few who compose my world. As a gifted woman I should be known and remembered by all humanity. Mr. Meredith, forgive me for saying that I would not exchange my discontent for yours."

How he longed to tell her that this discontent with which she had no sympathy, arose from no paltry or dishonouring ambition: that he desired these social distinctions, in order that he might say to her—"The world will not call me an unworthy suitor."

At this moment Percy Carrick appeared

at the other end of the terrace. "I am sorry to disturb what is doubtless an exceedingly agreeable conversation," he said to himself, as he advanced towards them, "but my esteemed friend Lord Warton's interests must not be neglected by me, his confidant-in-chief. As I cannot see any chance of winning Beatrice for myself, there is nobody to whom I would give her in preference. She likes me, I know, and she will assist in retaining my influence over her apathetic husband ; so I shall serve both him and myself."

"Mr. Meredith is in a melancholy mood. I have been trying to cheer him, Percy," said Beatrice.

"I am sorry to hear it. Perhaps Mr. Meredith is in love," he answered, in an indifferent tone, but with a keen glance at Cyril. Percy Carrick's eyes never relaxed for an instant in their vigilance. It was one of his maxims that a man who wishes to succeed should observe everything, for he never knows when he will require the results of his observation.

"That is a subject of which you know very little, is it not?" asked Beatrice, with a slight blush.

"Practically, very little; but I have been the repository of the history of several unhappy attachments," he replied, in the same indifferent voice. "Love is a very common epidemic, I believe."

"And one from which the patient soon recovers, I hope," said Meredith.

"Well, as far as my experience goes, I have not found it very dangerous. I know several who have had the symptoms badly at first; and they have gone about for some time with their hair dishevelled, and with great neglect in their attire. But the majority of them are now married very happily to somebody else, and have comfortably forgotten the past."

"I do not fancy that *you* are likely to fall in love," said Beatrice smiling.

"It might retard the progress of your worldly success," added Meredith satirically.

"I should avoid it for that reason,"

replied Carrick coolly. "Love should be an agreeable pastime, not a dangerous sport in which you run the risk of moral death."

"You are to be congratulated on your ability to keep your emotions in subjection to your intellect," said Meredith coldly.

"My dear Mr. Meredith, it is in the power of every man to do the same. It merely requires a constant watch upon yourself. A man who cannot swim is foolish to venture into seven feet of water when he can easily keep within his depth."

"Your theory is to arrest yourself at the first indications of a declivity, before the impetus carries you to the bottom," said Lady Beatrice quickly.

"You have expressed my meaning exactly."

"Your theory is perfectly sound, and if all men were to carry it into execution, there would be no folly in the world. But the one drawback to that would be that wise gentlemen like yourself could no longer be

distinguished from a mass of fools," said Meredith.

"And I am not sure, Percy, that you have sufficient generosity to allow the human race to be regenerated at the loss of your own reputation," added Beatrice smiling.

"I should not dream of answering so personal a question," replied Percy gaily. "It is not my business to regenerate mankind; no *rôle* so thankless as that of a benefactor."

There was always that cynical under-current of thought running through Percy Carrick's conversation; that selfish reference to mere personal considerations which had prejudiced Cyril Meredith against him from the first.

CHAPTER XX.

A CONSULTATION.

"AT what determination have you and the fair Edith arrived?"

The speaker was Mr. Harwood, and the person whom he addressed Geoffrey Elmore.

"We have made up our minds to elope."

"Toelope!" echoed Mr. Harwood. "Very unpleasant alternative! sure to create a great scandal. And a man of the world should avoid scandal as much as possible."

"We have no other. Edith is too terrified to think of asking her mother."

"Frightened of Lady Barrington?" exclaimed Harwood, in an incredulous tone.

"She can be very violent when she pleases," said Geoffrey, in apology.

"Oh, I have no doubt that her amiability is only skin deep," replied his friend ; "but if I were a girl and loved a man, fifty such old dragons as she should not keep me from confessing what I had resolved to do. Frightened, bah ! The woman can't kill her."

"But the other way will save trouble," interposed Elmore.

"I never like sneaking away from the enemy, sir," replied his friend. He would have been false to his own nature if he had not placed some obstacles in the way of Geoffrey's proposition.

"It is only a prudent retreat from overwhelming forces," was the laughing answer.

But Mr. Harwood only shook his head more gravely at that pleasantry.

"Why the devil cannot fathers and mothers let the young people please themselves ?" he exclaimed, with sudden spleen.

"Gad, I wish I were a parent, just to set

them a good example ;” then he added, in a softer tone, “I daresay, though, I shouldn’t be much better than the rest. I should probably discover a hundred and fifty objections to any young man that my favourite daughter took a fancy to.”

There was silence between them for a little time, and then Harwood said—

“You are not going to elope from here, I hope?”

“No, there is no necessity for that. We can wait a little longer.”

“A few weeks will not make much difference in a lifetime, and to elope from here would be to upset us all. Besides, I should wish to be out of the way when Lady Barrington hears of it.”

“Are you afraid of her, too?” asked Geoffrey, laughing.

“Not I,” said Mr. Harwood, stoutly ; “but, my dear boy, I hate scenes, especially scenes with women. I never had any patience with tears and hysterics—they disgust me.”

"We will take care not to subject you to any such annoyance."

"Thank you," said Harwood, simply. "As *particeps criminis*, I wish you every happiness."

Geoffrey Elmore's first idea had been to elope from Cheverton ; but, on discussing it with Edith, he had been brought to see that it would be a very bad return for Lord Ravensworth's hospitality to create such a scandal at his house. Geoffrey's object in getting her away from Cheverton was to remove her from the influence of her mother, and more especially from the vicinity of Mr. Champion, whose attentions were becoming more marked. He was a fond, but a somewhat suspicious lover, and he was not sure that if he permitted too long a period for reflection, Edith might not come to the conclusion that she had made a foolish choice. With Talbot Champion at hand to remedy her mistake—for he was quite certain that this gentleman would propose with very little encourage-

ment—such a conclusion would be very dangerous. But when he had suffered a hint of this to escape him, Edith had replied to his unjust suspicions in a manner that was almost indignant.

“It is evident that you place no great confidence in me. If my fickleness of character is such as to justify your suspicions, it will be better to find it out before than after marriage. It will be wiser, then, to leave me as much as possible within the sphere of Mr. Champion’s superior attractions—that will assist you in proving me.”

Alarmed at that angry speech, Geoffrey had recanted, and assured her of his implicit confidence in her faith.

But Geoffrey Elmore’s dislike and apprehension of Talbot Champion were friendly feelings in comparison with Lord Warton’s hatred towards Cyril Meredith, when at the end of the week which Percy Carrick had requested for accurate observation, he learned the result.

“I will wager my reputation that they

are more than friends," said that philosophical gentleman, in his usual calm way. "Cyril Meredith is decidedly in love with Beatrice : that she reciprocates the attachment fully is more than I can aver ; but I am convinced that she likes him better than any other person at present residing at Cheverton Hall."

Warton turned pale with anger. It was a sufficient humiliation to have been rejected ; but for him, the future statesman, the heir to the honours and fortune of the great house of Burnley, to occupy a lower place in her esteem than this literary *parvenu* ! the idea was almost insupportable. Percy Carrick watched the progress of his friend's emotion with the same cynical indifference with which he regarded most things.

"Can nothing be done to prevent this monstrous alliance ?" he asked, at length.

Carrick shrugged his shoulders.

"*Que faire*," he said, coolly. "You might challenge him, but public opinion

would not compel him to go out. And even if you were to fight, the wrong man gets shot as often as the right one. There is no physical mode of arbitrament in which one of the antagonists is not almost sure to possess an unfair advantage ; the principal reason why the public, become conscious of this fact, wisely resorts to the law-courts. But even if you could indict Mr. Meredith before a tribunal of lovers, it is by no means certain that you would obtain a verdict."

"Have the kindness to dispense with jesting for the present," replied Warton irritably. "I am not disposed to view this matter in your indifferent or lenient spirit : it is too grave."

Carrick checked the smile that rose to his lips at this pompous speech, and said—

"My dear Warton, I have not the least doubt that it occasions you great concern. I wish it were in my power to suggest some rational plan of action. But had I ten times the intelligence that I do possess, I

could not summon the ghost of an idea. Can you ?”

“Inform her father at once as the first step,” said Warton eagerly.

“Inform her father of what ?” asked Carrick. “That you and I, Lord Warton and Percy Carrick, not finding our own affairs sufficiently engrossing, have been obliged to amuse ourselves by prying into other persons, and have arrived at the end of our labours in the *suspicion*, mark that, only the *suspicion* that his daughter and Meredith are in love.”

“And a very proper communication to make to a father,” interrupted Warton.

“Well, I cannot agree with you,” replied Carrick. “Ravensworth could not take any decisive attitude upon such bare suspicions. If he spoke to Beatrice on the subject, she would, no doubt, deny it stoutly—put Meredith on his guard, and act with great circumspection herself, until she found a more favourable opportunity. And I should not be surprised if the grand climax of our

interference was reached in both father and daughter politely requesting us to find a scope for our detective talents in any other place than Cheverton."

"And your deliberate advice is to stand tamely here; see this going on before our eyes, and do nothing. Percy Carrick, have you no feeling? Would you allow your old friend, your old childish playmate, to be sacrificed to a base, scheming upstart like this—Pah, the scoundrel's name chokes me!" said Warton, pacing to and fro angrily. "It is monstrous!"

"You let your passion run away with your judgment," said Carrick calmly. *He* had never committed a similar indiscretion in his life.

Warton did not design to answer his friend, but kept on pacing to and fro.

"Who would have dreamed that this phlegmatic creature had such a volcano in him," thought Percy Carrick to himself: then he said aloud, "I would much prefer that Beatrice should marry you. Mr. Me-

redith is a most estimable person, doubtless, but he can scarcely expect his genius to receive, amongst other substantial rewards, the hand of one of the most beautiful women in English society. But if she is foolish enough to give him encouragement, you may be sure that she has debated the question fully with herself, and not looked at it from our point of view. Apart from personal liking, to a woman of her peculiar temperament, it would seem a highly meritorious action to bestow upon a poor man of talents the worldly advantages arising from so brilliant an alliance."

Did Percy Carrick take a delight in probing his friend's wound? It was more than possible, for he had a profound contempt for the display of such womanish irritability as Warton was indulging in, and had he been bound to him by less personal ties, would have taken no pains to conceal his contempt. If a man's intellect will not enable him to rise superior to common-place emotion, he must suffer; but, at

least, let him have the decency to suffer in silence, was Mr. Carrick's philosophy. One of the most delightful pages in history, in his opinion, was that which related the fortitude with which the dauntless Spartan boy suffered the fox to gnaw his vitals.

"I will insult him publicly," exclaimed Warton, in a pause of his excited walk.

"Bah!" replied Carrick, contemptuously. Warton's foolish harping on this theme was getting too much for his patience, he hated to see a man waste time over a losing game. "How will you accomplish it? throw a glass of wine in his face, and get a decanter at your head in return?"

"I can insult him on any paltry pretext," replied Warton, fiercely.

"And put yourself in the wrong in the eyes of everybody!" said his friend. "No, no, Warton, if anything can cure this infatuation, it will be that skilful physician, old Time. If we had lived in the old days, and had caught the morality of that cheerful period, we could have poisoned him, or

hired a bravo to stab him. But we are in the nineteenth century, and we should thank our stars for the fact," said Percy Carrick, smiling; "since in the other case, the life of the most intellectual man would have been at the mercy of the most brainless ruffian. Cyril Meredith is not to be put out of the way."

But the flame of Lord Warton's indignation did not seem to be at all quenched by Carrick's cold stream of eloquence. "I must act for myself then, since you will not assist me," he said, as he walked away in great indignation.

"Obstinate fool!" was Carrick's first reflection, as he watched the retreating figure of his friend. "It is his dignity that is ruffled, not his love that is wounded. Ha! ha! I wonder what he would say if he knew that *I* had nursed ambitious hopes in the same quarter! It amuses and disgusts me to see that icy nature melting before the fire of rage. I don't like that fellow Meredith. There is a mutual anti-

pathy, I think ; but I wouldn't mind seeing him her accepted suitor just to enjoy Warton's dismay. But I must not sacrifice my interests to my love of amusement. I must do all I can to secure her for my noble friend. He is too useful to lose ; I have vexed him already with my want of sympathy. I must go and still the troubled waters." And with this praiseworthy intention, Percy Carrick departed in search of Warton.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RIVALS.

"I HAVE a piece of news that will interest you," said Mr. Harwood, one morning, advancing towards a group in the grounds, the centre of which was Lady Beatrice, with an open letter in his hand. "Lucy Dermot eloped yesterday with Chevenix."

There was a general exclamation of surprise from all. Lucy Dermot and Mr. Chevenix were both well known in London society. She was a *belle*, and he was a not particularly rich author. Lady Barrington was the first to put her surprise in words, and to deplore the imprudent proceeding of the young couple.

“Poor dear Lady Dermot! How will she be enabled to support so much misfortune? It is one of the most shocking cases I ever heard of, and Lucy cannot be spoken of in terms that are severe enough. A girl who has had such brilliant offers as she—she had a *most* brilliant one this season to my own knowledge, for her mother was my informant—to throw herself away upon a man without either family or fortune! If he had been rich, one might have pardoned him his doubtful origin. But Lucy is the most to blame, brought up so carefully by so exemplary a mother. If it had been my daughter, it would have broken *my* heart. I suppose this Mr. Chevenix is nobody?” she added, turning to Mr. Harwood.

But before that gentleman, who usually observed great deliberation in his speech, could answer the question, Lord Warton took the reply from him, speaking in a quick, harsh tone, that gave evidence of the existence of strong feeling,—

“ His grandfather was an auctioneer. No discredit in that ; he has worked his way up, and deserves respect for the ability which has lifted him into another sphere. But such a marriage is absurd, and both will repent it only too soon. Love in a cottage sounds well enough in romance, but in reality it means a brief dream from which you wake to discontent. Lucy Dermot has been brought up in a world of luxury where every reasonable wish has been gratified. Do you think she will endure with tranquillity the petty and miserable economy entailed by such an union ? Then there will always be subjects on which two persons belonging to different classes can never touch. If Lucy speaks with natural pride of her family, the allusion will gall Chevenix who has no ancestor to be proud of. In time, no doubt, the wife will begin to wish the husband had been a little better born, so that her relations would not look down upon him. And when women began to indulge in wishing

that things had been a little different, we know that discontent takes the place of love, and will soon expel it from the heart altogether."

"Do you think Miss Dermot has not foreseen these disqualifications in her suitor?" asked Meredith sarcastically.

"Scarcely, or her common sense would have enabled her to see the folly of such an union. Romantic young ladies despise the future, and the future avenges itself on them. But, in my opinion, Chevenix has acted treacherously to the wife as well as to her parents. A man of the world can see what is hidden from an inexperienced girl. He has committed her to a life in which poverty, humiliation, and remorse will be her inseparable companions. He may call this love; I call it selfishness."

"I venture to dispute the truth of your gloomy picture," replied Cyril coldly. It was obvious to all present that Warton's remarks upon this subject must be excessively offensive to a man who suffered

from the same social disqualifications as Mr. Chevenix. "Love does not feed upon wealth and state : that cold affection which does duty for it in so many soulless unions may be nourished on such food. But a woman can love a man well enough to sacrifice for his sake those luxuries of life which gratify the senses, that glitter and pomp which fascinate the eye, but which can never satisfy a noble heart that must worship noble idols."

Jealousy completely masters every fine feeling which had influence before its baneful sovereignty. Warton was certainly the haughtiest man living, but his pride "lay deeper than to wear it as his ring," and had he been conversing with the humblest, he would not have uttered a word to wound their self-respect. Yet, now, he stooped to insult a helpless man on the accident of birth.

"I think it is impossible, for obvious reasons, for us to agree on this matter, Mr. Meredith," he said, in an icy tone.

Cyril's brow grew dark at those insulting words. Had men only been present, his reply might have provoked a quarrel; but controlling himself by a great effort, he said, coldly—

“I understand the sneer conveyed in those words, my lord, and I have too much self-respect to continue the discussion after their utterance. Still, had you chosen it, I think we might have agreed to argue on this matter without allowing personalities to intrude into our arguments.”

Warton did not reply, and after a few minutes walked away. The sympathy of nearly all the listeners to this brief dialogue was with Cyril. They might have felt disposed to agree in Warton's view, but they all recognised the covert insult intended in those seemingly simple words “for obvious reasons.”

Warton hurried into one of the most unfrequented portions of the park, where he remained for some time a prey to his mingled jealousy and anger.

“I hated the fellow from the first moment that I saw him!” he said, bitterly, as he walked to and fro with his arms folded, and his face revealing the strong emotion to which he was usually such a stranger. “And I could see that in her heart she espoused his cause against mine. Carrick is right: there is a more tender feeling than that of friendship between them. Would Beatrice be mad enough to sacrifice herself like that feather-headed Lucy Dermot? Ah, Cyril Meredith! if I could but humble you in *her* eyes, I would renounce even my hopes of winning her for myself!”

CHAPTER XXII.

WOODED AND WON.


THE group gradually dispersed soon after Lord Warton's exit, and Cyril and Lady Beatrice were left alone, and as soon as they were free from listeners, she came closer to him, and said in a sweet, earnest voice,

"Mr. Meredith, let me entreat you to think no more of these words. Forgive me if my interference or counsel in such a matter seems to savour of impertinence. But I do not forget that you said we were to be friends. Lord Warton is a vain, proud man ; vain of his name, his family, in a word, of everything which he has done nothing to win. Do not give him, even in

thought, the triumph of insulting you. Believe me, when I say, that from your height, you can afford to look down and pity him."

"You are right, Lady Beatrice, and I feel myself to be superior to this insolent noble. I thank you for your counsel, but I am too sensitive to forget this scene in a moment. Besides, I should not attach such importance to Lord Warton's insults, if I did not know that he was the spokesman of a large section of his class. We, men of genius, as they call us, are tolerated because we contribute to their entertainment, but we are presumptuous if we look for anything beyond toleration, and are swiftly reminded of our presumption."

"Do not say tolerated," exclaimed Beatrice warmly. "Do not look upon Lord Warton as a representative of his class. He is, as I told you, a vain, proud, narrow-minded man. There are plenty who are as proud of your friendship, Mr. Meredith, as I and my father are," she added gracefully.



"An inoffensive mode of toleration, that is all," replied Cyril, with a half-sad smile. "You let us make one at your social gatherings; you compliment us in honeyed speeches; listen to us with marked attention, even defer to our judgment on some matters. But, in spite of all this seeming, there is tacitly defined between us a broad line of demarcation, which we, knowing too well the nature and the terms of our friendship, must not presume to cross, save at the sacrifice of our own self-respect."

"I do not understand you," she said, with downcast eyes.

"Oh, it is not a hard matter to understand. Let me endeavour to make it clear to you. Suppose I had a friend amongst your order, a man of ancient and illustrious descent, who professed for me a more than ordinary regard, gave me convincing proofs of his consideration; treated me to all outward seeming in every respect as an equal, bridging over with his condescension that social gulf which yawned between us;

and suppose that I, wishing to test the strength of his regard, sought him one day and said, 'My lord! you have been kind enough to lead me to infer that you consider my possession of those gifts which have won for me a fair amount of fame, sufficient compensation for my social disqualifications.

- I wish now to see if you can give me the best proof of the sincerity of your sentiments. I love your daughter, my lord, for whom you doubtless wish to secure a brilliant alliance. Can you resolve to rise superior to the prejudices of your caste, and give your child to a man who has no other recommendation than his native worth?' Suppose I were to put that question to my friend, Lady Beatrice, what do you think would be his answer? Should I not, in seeking such distinction, have stretched his friendship to the point where it would break?"

A vivid blush rose to her fair cheek, as she answered in a low voice, and with downcast eyes; "If he thought as I should

on such a matter, he would answer that he would bestow his daughter's hand where she had already given her heart."

"If he were like you, that might perhaps, be his answer. But granting that there existed a father who proved such an exception to his order, what daughter would look with favour upon so humble a suitor? Or granting that she looked upon him with favour, would allow her heart to lead captive her judgment?"

"You wrong my sex when you refuse to believe in the existence of such a woman," said Beatrice, raising her eyes, and speaking with sudden warmth.

"But think for a moment of the two extremes between which her choice would lie—on the one hand a future that corresponded in every item to her past; the luxury, pomp, and power that had hitherto made life glide like a Sybarite's dream:—on the other, exile from everything that she had learned to prize, despised by most, pitied by the charitable. Who can

doubt that in time, when reality had exposed the falsehood of romance, she would grow keenly conscious and bitterly regretful of her imprudent choice? Who could blame a woman for refusing to commit herself to such a future?"

"What true woman, having counted the cost of the step she had taken, would repent when repentance availed her nothing?" was her answer.

"Lady Beatrice, is it possible that you speak seriously?" asked Meredith, with eagerness in his tone. "Are you not laying down rules of conduct for others, which you would never permit to guide your own."

"I am speaking from my heart," she answered, earnestly. "Do me, at least, the justice of acknowledging that I am somewhat different from ordinary women; that this sacrifice of which you speak would constitute no martyrdom to me, for one,"—her voice faltered here a moment—"whom I loved sincerely."

That tone, that look betrayed all. In a moment Cyril Meredith had taken her hand, and was pouring out his tale of love."

"O Lady Beatrice, your words have given me such hope, and yet I have scarcely courage to say more, lest that hope should be suddenly snatched from me, and leave me a thousand times more bankrupt in heart than ere I saw and loved you. I have confessed it at last, and you do not frown upon my presumption. You do not withdraw this hand, which I have dared to clasp. O Beatrice, is my long-cherished dream of happiness to be fulfilled so soon? Are you the bright angel I have dreamed of, sung of, who is to lead me into that Eden of love that I feared would never admit me within its gates? May I, a poor poet, lacking in birth and fortune, dare to hope that I am loved by you, the idol of so many hearts? What have I done that I should deserve such happiness?"

“Are we not kindred spirits, Cyril Meredith, and is not that a sufficient bond of union?” she answered, softly. “Where could I meet with one who could sympathize with me, understand me as you do? Can I, in truth, make you so happy? I fear I must fall far short of your ideal. Ah, yes, I have known it as well as you. You have described her in your poetry, which I know by heart,” she added, with a charming playfulness.

“My own love—since it is not a dream, and I may dare to call you by that name—I could not render justice to your portrait if I painted it in the brightest hues! Love loses its eloquence when it has gained its desire, struck dumb in the contemplation of its supreme happiness. How feebly would those verses read that I wrote before I knew the real meaning of love—mere fragments of divine music rendered by unskilful hands.”

“Will you always love thus?” she asked, softly.

"Measure my nature with your own, and let that be the surety for my faith. But, Beatrice, even in this hour of rapture I am compelled to doubt. Your father will never consent to our union. I am walking now in the land of romance, but *he* will bring me back into that of reality."

Her cheek paled slightly at the mention of her father, but she answered in a firm tone,

"Leave that to me; I will take a favourable opportunity. He has seldom thwarted me in anything, and when he learns that my happiness is staked upon his consent, he will not consign his child to misery. He was a poor man once himself, before he succeeded to his cousin's title, and he has known what it is to love; yes, as passionately as any poet that ever charmed the world to listen to his despairing lyrics!"

"I will prove myself worthy of my great fortune," said Cyril, enthusiastically. "If

you have cause to blush for my birth, you shall, at least, have reason to be proud of the man."

"And noble deeds, Cyril, are the sole patent of nobility, which kings can neither give nor take away," said Beatrice, with a proud smile. "The unthinking may pay homage to mere rank and title, not heeding whether the wearers grace them or not. But native worth commands a higher and more glorious homage still, the reverence and esteem of every true heart."

They walked back to the house in comparative silence. Meredith could find no words to express his great love; praise that would have honoured others could but have made her appear less divine to his fastidious fancy, have drawn her down to that earth-level which he had placed her so far above. Once she turned round to him with an arch smile, and said—

"Does Plutus still hold the golden key that unlocks the heart?"

And he answered quickly—

“I will recant that heresy, for I have proved this day that it has passed into the hands of Cupid.”

END OF VOL. I.







